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THE EMISSARY BY JIM BROWN

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# THE EMISSARY



BY JIM BROWN

Illustrated by Pawelka

*A man may go mad; then he can be kept from causing harm by crippling him, by binding him—or, most effectively by curing him. And perhaps societies go mad, too...*

"BIG fellow," Manazetti said, gingerly leaning his hand against the ten-inch-thick glass wall of the cell.

"Bright looking chap," I commented beside him. Then, mere physicist, I added humbly: "What do you think, Manazetti? Can you make any estimate of the creature's intelligence from his appearance?" Manazetti was the expedition's chief psychologist.

"Nothing specific. There are the usual evolutionary indices, of course: Big brain case; frontal arch well-developed. But then evolution takes some funny twists sometimes. I'd have to make tests before I commit myself."

We resumed our inspection, silently.

The captive was tall, a good nine feet, I should say, but for a humanoid incredibly lean. His nude body was covered with a gray, downy fur that looked as though it might be very pleasant to touch. It would have given him a simian look had his forehead not been so high, his nose so narrow, his lips so full and short. He was a first-rate humanoid, if I was any judge. At the moment he was half-sitting, half-lying on a table, staring at Manazetti and me quite genially, I thought.

The psychologist, on the other hand, thought differently.

"Sullen fellow," he said.

I laughed. And explained.

"Still," Manazetti said when I had finished, "I don't like it." And strode away, I supposed, to get his testing equipment.

I stayed for a moment after he had gone. Then I, too, remembered some business and turned to go. The captive smiled, I think, as I was leaving.

I thought I knew what it was the psychologist didn't like. It had taken six of Earth's biggest cruisers and thirty thousand armored marines to get that single captive. And it had taken them two weeks to do it.

We were, to put it bluntly, the scientific call-boys to a military task force, although our general orders talked rather misleadingly of "scientific exploration," the "extension of civilization," and the benefits to subject peoples of "democratic commerce." But the only good reason for the presence of the Terran Fleet here in this empty corner of space, nine light-years from

home, was to conquer and, if necessary, destroy the population of a certain lonely cloud-bound planet in the system of Sirius and to convert it to a Class-A military outpost. It happened to be the bad luck of this lonely planet, and of the life that inhabited it—to possess physical characteristics—gravity, density, soil-structure, and atmospheric composition—within two per cent of Terra's own. The only terraform deviation, in fact, was its thick layer of perpetual cloud. This made it an Earth-Type-Four on Terra's charts, and the only terraform planet of any type within seven light-years of the Inner Ring.

One conquest leads to the necessity of another, as every Terran schoolboy knows, and since the invention of atomic fission, the transtemporal drive, the gravitic force field and other notable landmarks in the advance of Terran science, Terran war vessels had been ranging in swiftly widening rings about old Sol for a couple of centuries, now. Sirius-A was to be just one more notch in Earth's expanding belt.

Was still to be, of course. Although the invasion had gone oddly and not quite according to schedule. Take the matter of the single captive that so worried Professor Manazetti:

Docile and backward enough, and entirely without weapons of offense or defense, the humanoid inhabitants of Sirius-A had nevertheless managed to evade the foraging marines with a skill that was a little uncanny.

Apparently no higher advanced than the most rudimentary rural level, the Sirians lived in tiny villages, scattered evenly over the great, parklike land areas of their cloud-swept planet. In these villages they were content to be observed—at a distance—either from land or from the murky air. And they offered no objection to the establishment of the nine preliminary bases prescribed in the invaders' master plan. But they scrupulously avoided all contact with their conquerors. They withdrew when approached by the most peaceful-seeming mission. And they literally couldn't be captured.

No Terran knew exactly how this skillful evasion was accomplished. A village would be selected for capture. Armored marines would draw up in impassable ranks around

it. Gun-bristled aircraft would hover in the perpetual cloud above it. And, up until the last moment, the fated villagers would be seen going about their simple, rustic business—tending their land, working in their crude shops, or, more often than not, dancing or singing in alien loveliness in the ever-present village square. Apparently—though obviously not really—oblivious to the would-be conquerors surrounding them, they would play thus until the very moment of the strike. Then, as marines swooped suddenly in from land and air—they disappeared. Simply disappeared. The village and all its shops, halls, and houses would be quite in order, but empty. Every Sirian, from the oldest invalid to the tiniest infant would have vanished.

Some said they had the power of invisibility. Others, still more fanciful, spoke of teleportation. Being senior physicist I was asked to pass judgment on this last hypothesis—and did so, cruelly. So the best-informed military opinion had it that they flew, by vessels or means unknown, to cloud-cover that always hung in the tree tops and, thus hidden, made their way to neighboring villages.

There was a good deal of evidence for this. Airmen back from a futile strike would report gray shadows in the mist. Marines were said to have heard sounds like laughter overhead. And neighboring villages *did* seem to be unusually crowded after such a strike. But no one knew for certain.

They were not invulnerable, of course. A curious naval pilot had tested this hypothesis one day—to his and everyone else's satisfaction. A stepped-down atomic disintegrator dropped over a village square had left a satisfactory but somewhat bloody pile of gray pelts on the grass. And a repetition of the experiment with anti-personnel bombs of the fragmentation type gave further proof that the evanescent gray creatures were at least killable. The subjects of the re-test were engaged in some primitive dance, at the time, and some very fine cadavers were secured for the medicos.

But there were never any wounded to be rescued and healed from these experiments. Evidently the last skill to depart the Sirian body was that of disappearance. Either that or with uncanny agility the unwounded carried off the wounded as smartly as they did themselves.

After two weeks of this, after the nine

bases had been firmly established and secured against any possible counterattack, and just as any hope of "peaceful conquest" had been abandoned and rumor talked about the possibility of annihilation, the Captive had been found.

It would be a mistake to say that he had been "captured." He was found sleeping in one of the back rooms of a rather small house in an otherwise empty village. He awakened easily and, offering no resistance, accompanied the somewhat nervous marines to the nearest spacefield. There he was taken by tender to the laboratory-ship *Dorian*, and safely installed for observation in one of the many glass cells. The *Dorian* immediately blasted out to seven hundred thousand kilometers and assumed a free-fall orbit around the misty planet. We were taking no chances. For all we knew the "captive" might change his mind.

That was what worried Tom Manazetti. Not that the Captive might *change* his mind. Tom would, I think, have been pleased with that. But that he had ever made up his mind in the first place—to *be* our Captive. This worried him. And, I must confess, it worried me for a while. Although, as I said, I am a physicist and do not understand these things.

"Now, look here, Manazetti," Culpepper, the old evolutionist was saying. "Science begins with astronomy—always and everywhere. The first regularities noticed by any people are the movements of the stars. Here and only here are nature's laws openly displayed. And it is difficult to imagine a primitive intelligence first seeing the hidden regularity in nonstellar phenomena. Hence, no stars, no science. And Sirius-A, being cloud-bound, has no science!"

"Q.E.D." I murmured, and stopped to listen. There was little enough for a poor physicist to do, these days, what with the Captive, a bio-psychological phenomenon, occupying everyone's attention. Except to straighten out my more fortunate colleagues when they trod too confidently in my field. And . . . well, every physicist is secretly an astronomer at heart.

It was after the evening mess, in the second week after the Captive's "capture." I sat down beside Manazetti and prepared to take exception to everything Culpepper said.

"Sorry, Culpepper," Manazetti was saying amiably, "that doesn't necessarily follow. One could, you know, start with less



obviously regular phenomena, and still develop a science. It might take a little longer, of course."

I permitted myself a nod of agreement and turned to the biologist. I could see he was a little miffed at my taking sides so early. His rejoinder was directed half at me.

"I am not arguing for necessity, gentlemen. But only for probability. I am saying that the probability of physical science developing in a cloud-bound environment is relatively slight. And furthermore, we have empirical evidence of this." Glancing at the ceiling the biologist consulted his tomblike memory. "Out of six hundred and seventy-three Earth-type-fours—Sirius-A is the seventy-fourth, gentlemen—exactly three hundred and three planets have developed life sufficiently intelligent, biologically speaking, to develop science. Not one of these three hundred and three races actually did so, however. Earth-type-four is a scienceless environment, gentlemen."

There was something final about all this. But Manazetti said:

"I grant your case for *physical science*, Culpepper, but—"

"And what other kind of science is there?" someone asked, not unkindly.

Manazetti grinned at his tormentor. "Why, in addition to psychology there are a few. Sociology, economics, anthropology—" He counted them off. "In a word, there is *social science*. Depending on physical measurement, to be sure, but nevertheless a branch of science that the Sirians might easily have developed despite their clouds."

But Culpepper was smiling at the sight of an easy victory.

"My dear professor," he began ponderously, "as you have yourself suggested, to the extent that any of these so-called sciences is a science it has adopted techniques first standardized in the physical sciences. Why, the very concept of 'measurement,' of 'experiment,' of 'number,' even, have their historical origin in physical science. It is difficult for me to see, Manazetti, how any social science could develop without these concepts."

"Still—" Manazetti began. And stopped, somewhat flustered.

"What exactly do you mean by 'science,' Professor Culpepper?" I asked in the ensuing silence.

"I mean, Grant, prediction from measurement. Nothing more, nothing less."

"Physical measurement?" I pursued.

"Tactile, sensible measurement. That would include counting, of course." He eyed me warily.

"Then it seems to me you are begging the question, professor. Perhaps Manazetti, here, means something quite different by 'science'?"

Manazetti took me up like a flash. "Of course, I mean by 'science' simply a habit of mind, a respect for facts. Objective, unbiased observation. *Possibly* leading to prediction, but a prediction that may or may not be based on physical measurements."

"Then, it seems to me," I said, turning to Culpepper, "that something could well turn up on an astronomically-blind world that would not be science by your definition, Culpepper, but might be science by Manazetti's. A nonmaterial science not based on physical prediction, for example. Although, I confess, being a physicist, with a physicist's bias, I would be a little sceptical of such a so-called science, myself."

Manazetti laughed. "Now don't back down on me, Grant!" Then seriously, to both of us, "Look here, you two, you have just admitted that among us the social sciences bear the earmarks of their historical debt to the physical sciences. Concepts like 'social force,' and so forth. But obviously, they would bear no such earmarks had they developed independently of physical science. Right?"

"Right," I said.

"Proceed," said Culpepper dubiously.

"And without such earmarks we would not recognize them as science at all. Am I right?"

"Probably not," I said.

"If they were *really* sciences, we would," Culpepper said stubbornly.

Manazetti turned to Culpepper. "Look, sir, you yourself just now defined what is *really* science in such a way as to include one of these earmarks—physical measurement. Doesn't that mean that if you saw something *without* any of these familiar earmarks of science among us, you would certainly *not* be likely to call it a science?"

"It certainly does, young man. But I don't see—"

"Then it is also possible that some of the three hundred and three cloud-bound races you biologists have categorized as nonscientific, might actually have possessed a rudimentary social science without your recognizing it was such. Is that possible?"

"I'm afraid he's got you, Culpepper," I grinned.

"I suppose he has," the old man admitted ruefully. "Still, I don't see that a 'science' that was unrecognizable as such could possibly be powerful enough to hurt us." He turned to me: "You know what our psychologist here, is saying, don't you, Grant? He's convinced that the Sirians have something really devilish up their sleeves—a psychological super-science, or something like that."

"So I'd heard," I said. And smiled at Manazetti. "But on what evidence, I hadn't heard," I invited.

But Manazetti was reticent about his evidence, if any.

"I said they may have," he answered quietly. "Only that they may have a non-physical science powerful enough to do us all in. There's something about the Captive that—"

"Nonsense!" Culpepper said. "You said yourself he has the mind of a high-grade moron."

"So he tests. So he tests," said Manazetti morosely.

Manazetti later told me something about those tests. The Captive had been a genial and willing subject. After the psychologist had learned from him enough about the Sirian tongue and the Sirian culture to transliterate his instruments for the Captive's use, Manazetti tested him. The results were precisely as expected: he had exactly the intelligence that Culpepper and his crew of evolutionary experts had predicted would be normal for the biological level of the Sirian body-form. This had satisfied Culpepper enormously; he was writing a book on morphological techniques of prediction. But it had strangely disturbed the psychologist.

"Look, Grant," he confided one afternoon. "Everything about the Captive is just what we expect. He's just as intelligent as we want him to be; no more, no less. The anthropologists are getting just the answers from him that they expected from looking at the villages. He's as rural and as primitive as the textbook says he should be; no more, no less. I tell you, it's got me scared!"

"Scared?" I laughed. "I'd think you'd be happy. If all my predictions came out on the nose—" I was having trouble with Sirius' halo-protuberances at the time. Neither the big star nor its companion had

quite the sub-atomic conversion cycle that it should have had.

"Don't you see?" Manazetti pleaded. "It's just too pat. It's just as if he were playing a game with us. Like he knew exactly what we want him to say and then says it."

"Telepathy?" I asked sympathetically.

"No. Teleportation," he snorted and walked away.

It was a crack, of course. The first thing the military people had wanted us to get from the Captive was an explanation of that disappearance act his compatriots were so skillful at. The Captive was surprised at our question but willingly told us all he knew. This was simply that he and all Sirians could fly from birth.

The partisans of the "teleportation" theory were naturally very sad to hear that the Sirians could fly and that they used the cloud layer to travel in out of long custom, rather than from any specific desire to mystify us.

As to how they flew, the Captive could explain nothing. He could just fly, that's all, and was very surprised to learn that we could not. He offered to give us a demonstration and a number of neurologists, psychologists, and physicists were called in to take measurements. I had my crew set up a universal wave detector and we were not especially surprised to find that it was a negative gravitational field that the Captive generated when he rose effortlessly to the ceiling of his cage, and a repulsion field when he moved forward. Neither of these two wave-phenomena is exactly rare these days.

But we were all stumped on the exact manner of this gravity generation in the Captive's body. With us, you know, it takes a couple of tons of highly refined equipment to generate a milliampere of gravity. The Captive did it with a small gland weighing about two ounces in the center of his brain-case, just about where the pineal gland would have been if he had been human. And the neurologists could tell us no more than that.

Well, it was just about teleportation, at that. I suppose Manazetti would not have been very surprised to find that the Captive was reading our brainwaves with a tengeram electro encephalograph installed in the tip of his fuzzy nose.

For everybody except Manazetti, however, the Captive made life aboard the *Dorian* considerably pleasanter. Not only



were he and his tribe the inexhaustible subjects of every conversation, but for all his high-grade moron's intelligence, the furry fellow was a friendly and amusing entertainer. It turned out that among his own people the Captive had been a singer and a dancer by profession and we aboard the cheerless *Dorian* put these skills of his to immediate use. The large room that held his glass cell became the center of after-dinner recreation for the homesick and the work-weary. And at such times the Captive would dance and sing for us in an effortless and altogether charming way, or answer numberless questions about his home and people with the naivete and quick readiness of a child.

There were many of us, myself included, who also made it a practice to drop in briefly on the Captive several times during the day and chat with him through the especially-contrived loud-speaker that communicated between the cell block and the larger room.

The military supervisors of our laboratory-ship at first took a very dim view of these proceedings, insisting that we secure passes and have them properly countersigned by the Officer-of-the-Day before visiting the Captive. There were not many of us, however, from physicist to historian, who did not have some legitimate reason for "studying" the Captive, and very soon the traffic in passes became so great that the military found themselves snowed under by their own orders. From that time on the pass-system was abolished and we were free to come and go as we liked, although the Captive, poor chap, stayed forever in his tiny cage.

It was not all play, however, for him or for us. By order of the expedition's commander in chief we were to prepare a comprehensive report, covering everything we could learn or guess about the Captive or his people. It was my job, of course, to discover the extent of the Captive's knowledge of physics, and by observing the physical plant of the abandoned villages, to prepare an estimate of the state of physical science among the Sirians. It sounded like an awesome task; but it was soon over. The Captive had no knowledge of physics.

"Captive," I once said, using the name he preferred to our garbled rendition of his own musical name. "Captive, if you and a friend were carrying a heavy object be-

tween you on a long pole, and this object slipped up the pole close to your end, which of you would be carrying the greater share of the load? Think now, which end would be heavier?"

"It doesn't matter," he returned promptly. "Because if, as you suggest, the load were unequal we would simply set it down and adjust it until it became equal again."

And another time, in an attempt to find the spark of motive:

"Tell me, Captive. You have seen the machines we humans build to do our work for us. Wouldn't you like to learn to build such machines for your own people to use?"

He smiled. "No, Grant. I think your fine machines would make more work for us than they would save. You Terrans, for example, work far more and far harder than we do for all your machines. And are less fit for dancing."

"But aren't you curious, man, about the laws of nature? Matter? Energy? Motion?"

"Curious? Yes, as a boy I played with sticks and balls and wondered what made them as they are. But as a man I work with my fellow men and wonder what makes them as they are."

Thus Culpepper's thesis was substantiated for the three hundred and fourth time.

As for the villages—I made trips to several of them, in widely different sectors of the planet—the answer was everywhere the same. Their artifacts were the products of extremely skilled artisans, bearing the mark of ingenious hand tools of every description. But of generalized knowledge of the principles of operation of even these simple machines there was not the slightest evidence.

The findings of the anthropologists, I learned, corroborated these observations of mine. After days of almost continuous interrogation of the Captive and many field trips to the planet, they made the following preliminary report to the rest of us on the general state of Sirian culture:

*The culture of the humanoid inhabitants of Sirius-A appears to be basically primitive and homogeneous over the entire planet. Despite the local variation in the art-forms practiced by these humanoids and despite the huge number of these forms—including all literary, graphic, musical, kinesthetic forms known to us and many more—the Sirian villages all operate at the same intermediate-rural, machineless level.*

The Sirian villages are all small—less than three hundred population, economically self-sufficient, unfederated locality-groups. But while there is little commerce and no political activity between these villages, there is much personal mobility between them of both a permanent and impermanent nature. Indeed, a Sirian will normally change his residence from ten to twenty times in a lifetime, usually but not always among villages on the same continent of the planet, and he will normally spend one fifth to one sixth of his life in travel over the whole planet, with a concentration of these traveling years in early adulthood. As far as can be determined there are no national differences, territorial boundaries, nor any other barrier to personal mobility.

Despite the importance of the village as the prime, perhaps the only, social unit, membership in it is surprisingly loose, being frequently changed and always voluntary. The political organization of the village is extremely primitive, there being no written law, no chieftains, heads, or authorities of any kind. For such few crimes as the villagers recognize, disagreeableness and failure to work being the principal two, the punishment is invariably expulsion from the village, frequently self-imposed and always informally and non-violently enforced.

Kinship is of little importance to the Sirian social system, though genealogical records are kept. What passes for the family among them is a temporary association of two to eight or ten young adults and the children resulting from the apparently promiscuous sexual relations of these adults. The association lasts during the childhood of the offspring, rarely longer, but while it lasts its members of both sexes are partially freed from the necessity of village work, this time being given over to child-care and early education. Further education of the young is a village responsibility, as is every other social function, including the care of the few sick and of the aged.

While possessing a clear-cut ethic, largely centering around the values of co-operation and self-realization, the Sirian captive is unable to comprehend the notion of religion and no cases of religious practices have been observed among his people.

In summary, the Sirian culture is well-developed artistically but primitive in every

other dimension. Although no instances of the superstitious and magical practices common to other primitive humanoid cultures have been observed among them, the Sirians have not developed nor shown any promise of developing a science of any kind.

There was something about this picture of Sirian life that, despite its apparent primitiveness, intrigued me. Shortly after the anthropologists' report had been distributed I button-holed one of them, a young Sinoterran by the name of Lu, and after my usual apology for being a mere physicist, I asked him:

"But are you sure they are really primitive, Lu? They don't sound exactly savage to me."

"The word 'primitive' in anthropological parlance means merely 'non-scientific,' Professor Grant," the young Chinese smiled. "And we are fairly certain of that."

"So am I," I said. "But—"

"Savage? No. They are surely not a savage people." He was silent for a moment. Then as if revealing a confidence: "As a matter of fact, professor, they are the most un-savage people I have ever encountered; or read about."

"Yes, they struck me the same way," I said. "Their refusal to play war with our soldier boys, for example."

Chin Lu laughed. "That may mean only good common sense, professor. Which, by the way, they also have plenty of. But what I have felt about their culture is something . . . well, essentially un-savage and peaceful—one of the culture-dominants, so to speak. They have never known war, y'know. And as far as we can tell, they know no conflict of any kind."

He stopped and gazed at me, wondering, I suppose if he dared continue.

"Go on, Lu," I said in as casual a tone as I could manage.

"Oh, it's probably nothing," he said with a careless wave of his slim hand. And began to move off.

"What's probably nothing?" I insisted, catching him by the sleeve.

"Their peacefulness. It's probably just hereditary—something like their furry hides. But it could be cultural. In which case—" He shrugged his shoulders and grinned at me. "Interested in anthropology, Professor Grant?"

"In which case, what?" I insisted.

"It is of no importance."

"In which case we might learn from them?"

"Perhaps," Lu said. And smiling his oriental smile he appealed to the urgency of his work and escaped me.

But the idea stuck and I did a little investigating on my own. I was slightly out of my province, I must admit, but the Captive didn't seem to mind:

"Chin Lu tells me your people have never known war, Captive. How do you account for that? Have you no pugnacious instinct?"

"Instinct?" he asked.

I explained as best I could that controversial term.

"No," he mused when I had finished. "I do not think we have a pugnacious instinct. We are born helpless and witless just like you. What we do we learn to do—even to fighting."

"Oh, you *do* fight, then?" I was strangely relieved.

"Oh yes. We have fights. But they are mostly among the youth."

"Ah," I said. "And what do they fight about? Girls?"

"No," he was openly amused. "No more than women fight over men. There is more than enough love for all, among our people."

"Well, then . . . property?"

Again, I had to explain.

"No," he said, but still half-puzzled, I could see. "We do not 'own' things, as you say. We have no money. We neither buy nor sell. We do, in fact, none of the things your economists, I believe you call them, expect us to do. We simply discover what we need. And what we need we produce—as a group, as a village."

"So. There's nothing to fight over there. Well, then what do you fight over?"

"Self-possession. The thing that Manazetti calls dignity. That, I suppose, is the nearest word you have for what I mean. It is very important to us."

"Oh," I said. "I think I see, though. When someone's dignity is offended then he fights. Is that it?"

He nodded. But I could see he was not very happy with my formulation of it.

"Well, we have fights over that sort of thing, too," I assured him.

"I mean, Grant," he said slowly. "That among the young, when pride is still fragile and untested, dignity is often worn like a shirt. It is easily soiled, torn, or scratched. Then there is sometimes danger. Insult.

Shouts. A day or two of strained feelings between friends. For dignity is a precious thing and easily threatened among the young. Then one fights, for self-possession. But with maturity, all this passes away. Do you see, Grant?"

"I think so," I said, taking a deep breath. "Anger. Insult. This is what you mean by fighting?"

He nodded.

"I see," I said.

He waited until I had finished my rather painful grinning. And then he said: "You must not mind, Grant, that your people are yet young. Cultures, too, lose the savagery of youth—in time."

I shall have to confess that I developed a rather strong attachment for the tall, furry fellow. And through him for his distant people. For a while I was rather ashamed of my potentially treasonous affection and kept it well-hidden, even from the Captive. But I soon learned that my feelings were rather widely shared.

"D'you know, Grant," Culpepper stopped me one day in the corridor, "that Captive fellow has a definite flair for setting things right. Two of my assistants, Brown and Littlejohn, have been having a rather beastly feud for a month or so. And yesterday, I saw them walking arm-in-arm like buddies. Naturally, I inquired a bit. D'you know what they told me?"

"That the Captive had been talking to them?"

"Exactly. And I hadn't been able to do a thing with them. Yes, sir, a definite flair."

Culpepper was very pleased. And so, it turned out, was everybody else who had any occasion for contact with the Captive—except Manazetti. The psychologist was still holding out for his something-dirty-afoot hypothesis.

One day I made the mistake of defending the Captive to him, for his exemplary behavior under rather trying circumstances, it seemed to me.

"He hasn't had to act up, Grant," Manazetti objected. "Things have been going just the way he wanted. You wait, Grant, until something goes wrong for his people. Then see what a fine fellow he is!"

"But what could he do, man?" I asked. "We still keep him in that foot-thick cage of his. And even if he got loose, somehow, he could do nothing at all to hurt us. He knows nothing, absolutely nothing, about

armaments or machinery. I can guarantee that."

"I know," the psychologist replied. "But he knows a good deal about us."

"So?" I said, mystified.

Manazetti puffed silently on his pipe. Then, irrelevantly: "Did I tell you he's reading books, now?"

"No!" I said, delighted. "Who swung that for the poor devil?"

"Culpepper."

"Well, well," I said, already looking forward to my next talk with the Captive. "Censored stuff, I suppose."

"Yes. No technical material. Just novels, biographies, and . . . oh, yes, he loves history books."

He sucked on his pipe for a moment. Bewildered I asked,

"And is that wrong? Is that, too, the sign of the devil?"

He ignored me and turned to go.

"And oh yes," he added as a parting shot. "I found out that he knows mathematics. Calls it a game his people play. But it's math, all right."

That did puzzle me a bit. I never would have guessed it.

But Manazetti had been right about one thing: things had gone smoothly with the invasion since the capture of the Captive; and hence, for the Sirian people. Somehow mollified by the presence of our single captive, the admirals had removed the pressure from the field commanders who, well sick of it by this time, had suspended their futile efforts to contact or capture the natives. And there were no more "experimental" bombings of the villages. Blake, one of the physiologists in the research section, had put up an awful stink about that, finally going straight to the General Staff itself, with his protest thinly veiled in "scientific objections." Blake won, finally, but it wasn't for the decent reasons he'd had in mind.

For it was now obvious that the Sirians had no great objections to our use of their planet for military installations. Or if they had, they took great pains not to reveal them. For except between ourselves and the lonely Captive, there was still no communication between the conqueror and the conquered. Fundamentally, the military did not wish to jeopardize this curious truce until their bases were permanently secured. Twelve great armored spacefields were to be built, together with repair and supply

facilities enough to serve Terra's entire fleet. For Sirius-A was to be the stepping stone to the outer galaxies. No pains were spared and for two weeks, engineers and soldiers alike devoted themselves exclusively to this mighty task.

Even so, the situation was an unprecedented one for the military and, one gathered from the boastful conversation of the junior officers who staffed the *Dorian*, they felt a bit uncomfortable and somewhat offended by the queer stalemate their victims had forced upon them.

Rumor had it that the "security-minded" voices in the military councils were still pressing for "protective annihilation" of the Sirians even after two weeks of unbroken, if silent peace. They argued, the story ran, that the Sirians might be treacherously biding their time. That they were silently waiting for the Terran warships to leave, once the bases were established, then to pounce on the marooned garrisons with weapons they had cleverly not yet shown, annihilating our troops to a man. The story went on to depict the bloody reception our tired ships would get from their own guns when they returned. Thus ran the eternal pessimism of the military mind.

The powerful representatives of the Imperial Government, rumor further flew, showed great resistance to this wanton slave-killing. Instead they pressed, in their turn, for the "extensions of civilization," for the immediate incorporation of Sirius-A as a colonial territory in Terra's democratic empire. And these auspicious developments, they rightfully insisted, would have to be preceded by greater contact with the aborigines than the military had yet achieved.

Opposed to both these points of view were the representatives of Terra's mighty commercial interests. Officially powerless, these men yet had the traditional rights of big money to dictate the terms of war or peace. Knowing that deepest footholds in a colonial economy are to be dug before government takes over, and knowing also that no money at all can be made from dead customers, they suggested a compromise proposal: Let the military make their bases invulnerable; then, working from these bases, let private citizens open up the territory as the government wished. But let them do it in their own way. And let the soldiers stand ready to defend the rights and skins of Terran citizens—by reprisals if

necessary. And in return civilian traders among the aborigines would keep the military informed. It was the age-old pattern.

In the end, as always, the big money won. At any rate this was the news that trickled down to the crew of the *Dorian*, a dozen administrative steps away from the scene of decision. And with it the news that the "private citizens" were on their way.

"And tomorrow the vultures will be here," Blake remarked grimly, referring, everybody knew, to the swarms of trading ships, miners, looters and fortune hunters that hovered in the wake of every military expedition—waiting for permissions to land.

"I wonder," I mused aloud, "what it will look like a year from now?" The Captive's parklike planet and the carefree, moneyless, uncomplicated lives his people had lived there.

"It was inevitable, Grant," Culpepper said; "as inevitable as human nature." But he was sad, this evolutionist, and angry at his own neat formulae, one could see.

We were sitting in the lounge, a small group of us, and discussing the news.

"Well, our work is done and we'll soon be home," someone said, in an attempt at cheerfulness. It was received with silence.

Then Chin Lu said: "What will they do with him—the Captive, I mean? Our report on him is finished. Do you suppose they'll let him go home?"

"I shouldn't wonder," I said, more optimistic than I had any right to be after a year's contact with the military mind.

Then I heard someone ask Manazetti: "How will he take the news, Tom, that the commercial fleet is arriving?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

There was something in his voice that made me turn and look at him. He was more disturbed than I had ever seen him. He continued in a low voice.

"But I've an idea his friends aren't going to stand for it when the beggars actually go to work on their lovely little planet."

As usual the dour psychologist was right. Radioed-in like fish in a net, the commercial fleet landed on Sirius-A before the week was out. And then, just two days later, the flash came. The fleet was in flight formation, set for a two-weeks' cruise in the unknown space beyond Sirius, and we in the *Dorian* had the starboard tender out

to take the Captive home when the intercom howled on the flagship band:

"Attention all ships, all hands! Assume battle stations. Battle Plan 14-C. Can raise no ground station on Sirius-A. Believe all garrison personnel have been overpowered, possibly annihilated."

And then from the commander of the *Dorian* to his crew:

"Attention all hands. The *Dorian* is proceeding to deep space in compliance with Battle Plan 14-C. The Captive will be kept under double guard. Force fields will be thrown up around the cell block. He will have no civilian visitors. That is all."

Most of us had collected in the cell block viewing room to bid the Captive farewell. There was a confused buzz of angry, disappointed talk when the intercom snapped off.

"Now, what'd they do that for?"

"Couldn't they have waited until we'd delivered the Captive?"

"Could've at least waited until we'd blasted off a bit!"

"Yes. What'll they do now?"

"The real question is: 'What will we do now?'" It was Blake's voice; hushed, stony and troubled.

Nobody knew.

But everybody knew what we might do. What we were capable of doing with the planet-shattering atomics, our battleships carried in their bellies—or the incendiary gases. Everybody knew about the seared and blackened planets that stood in the wake of Terran Progress. And nobody looked at the Captive as the guards hustled us out.

The *Dorian* dutifully transported our valuable scientific carcasses into deep space. Then we waited. At first there was no news. Then on the second and third day the news trickled in. All work suspended, we listened to the intercom from our separate cabins:

"Landings made on Sirius-A. No resistance encountered: "All bases on Sirius-A undamaged. All garrison personnel departed. There are few signs of struggle."

"Enemy losses slight. Three hundred and fourteen enemy dead found in and around empty bases. No Terran dead have been found."

"Sirian villages appear to be empty."

Then much later:

"Thorough search has disclosed no living being on planet Sirius-A. All enemy villages have been abandoned. No signs of the





thirty thousand missing garrison troops have been found to date. Search continuing."

"It is believed that our troops have been captured and carried to the cloud-layer above Sirius-A. Sirians are known to fly effortlessly. It is possible that the entire Sirian population is aloft."

Then came the order that set the physiologists on their ears:

To: Research Section, Dorian

From: CINC

*Prepare precise estimate of maximum duration of Sirian flight without food. Report within three hours.*

Genially, the Captive hovered for one hour at the roof of his cage while the physiologists tapped his alimentary system at nineteen index points. Then they took their data to the computers and worked feverishly for an answer.

At the end of two hours and twenty minutes the second order came:

To: Research Section, Dorian

From: CINC

*Ignore previous order. Sirians are obtaining food. Can Sirians fly while asleep?*

It was delivered to Blake who was Senior Physiologist. He tossed the paper into the air, cleared his computer of a figure in nineteen decimal-places with a great *thrrrrmp*, and announced triumphantly to the assembled company:

"Hot rockets, fellows! They're getting food!"

One of his more restrained colleagues retrieved the fallen spacegram and consulted the Captive briefly.

To-CINC

From: Research Section, Dorian.

*Yes. With food they can fly indefinitely.*

One of the navigation officers on the *Dorian*, whose brother was a pilot of a Landing Aircraft-Personnel on patrol duty over Sirius-A, said that his brother, with whom he played chess by spacephone every evening, said that they were rigging infrared-controlled nets to catch gray fish in gray soup. And that while on watch if you listened carefully you could sometimes hear them singing in the mist.

We stayed out there for nine days doing useful bits of scientific work—like spectrographing Sirius equatorially and counting the sweatglands per square inch of the Captive's skin—and then we received orders to go home; and to take the Captive with us.

Nobody knew quite why. Except that perhaps they wanted to give the Captive a more thorough going-over, in the light of new developments, than we could handle in the tiny laboratories of the *Dorian*. Or maybe because the high command was getting jittery over the ill-concealed sympathy the *Dorian's* crew had developed for the Sirian captive.

But whatever it was we were—well, frankly—delighted. For most of us it meant the end of our tours of military duty. "One



year or one completed space flight, which ever is the shorter" our draft papers read, and we were glad to accept this unexpected alternative, despite our second-thought pity for the now permanently-captive Captive. And anyway, in his primitive way, the furry fellow did seem the slightest bit eager about it.

"I have given up hope of returning to my people," he explained to us. "And since you have permitted me to read about Terra I have had a curiosity about your people that only a visit will satisfy."

A visit! God knows how they would treat this "visitor" on Earth! The poor fellow didn't know that his present scientific hosts were perhaps not typical of Terran prison-keepers in general. And we had not the courage to enlighten him.

But we tried to make the trip, at least, as pleasant for him as possible. He was allowed to read pretty much as he liked. And at our insistence the old freedom of visiting with him was restored.

As usual, he was explicitly grateful.

And so was I. With the termination of my research duties I found myself with the free time I had long wanted to devote to the Captive and the exotic puzzle he presented. His fascination for me was, if possible, enhanced by the new turn our conversations took when he had begun to read. Now he asked the questions, and of Terra, but with a pungency and charm that was an unfailing delight to me. Called forth largely by his reading, he would save his questions up for me; and when I arrived each day:

"What unnatural thing did we humans do today?" I would invariably ask.

"Well, Grant," he would begin smilingly, "I read here that all young Terrans are taught in school that if only they work hard enough they can all be millionaires. Yet I am almost sure I remember reading the other day that only a tiny fraction of one per cent ever achieve that enviable stature. And that these few do so largely by birth. Now Grant, explain to me how this can be."

"Perhaps the rest of us don't work hard enough," I might say. And thereby duck the issue. But more often I would try to peer with him—sometimes almost guided by him—into the inner working of our complex Terran society. I am a physicist by inclination and by training, but I had often wondered about the strange contradictions

and inconsistencies we Terrans live by, as a man will who is not wholly blind. And it was as if my eyes were focused and the old wonder deepened by my conversations with the Captive; he had the insight of the proverbial man-from-Mars.

We had one other pastime, the Captive and I. As Manazetti had hinted and as the Captive openly informed me, he did know a kind of mathematics. It was zero-less and in other ways quite crude, and devised, apparently, for the construction and solution of numerical puzzles of the simplest kind. The Captive was amazed at the speed with which by calculus, for example, or by matrix algebra, I could solve the most difficult puzzles his system was capable of. He would throw impossible constants into a tortuously formulated equation and then watch with delight as I translated and solved them on one of the small pocket computers I always carried with me. At such times he would carefully note the answers I arrived at as if to check some more laborious process of his own.

One day I offered to get a computer for him, for he was clearly fascinated by it and I knew that no possible harm and much possible good might come of his solving a few puzzles on his own. He was delighted to accept and after some embarrassed reflection I found a way to smuggle the small object in to him with his food. After that our game-playing took on a new and, one might say, almost professional flavor.

I was not the only one who found it profitable to spend time with the Captive. Despite the fact that all pretext of studying him was gone, now that we were no longer attached to the fleet, several of my colleagues were to be seen with him quite frequently, Culpepper especially, and Chin Lu, Blake, the physiologist, and of course, Manazetti, all spent nearly as much time with the Captive as I did. And, I suppose, for much the same reasons. Though oddly enough, we never had occasion to talk about these reasons among ourselves.

For all of us, however, long talks with the Captive were soon over. The nine light-years to Terra, with the latest thing in transtemporal drives, took the *Dorian* slightly less than a month to traverse. During that time we would hear occasional reports from the beleaguers of Sirius-A. They had domed all twelve bases with impervial lucite and manned them with fresh troops. They had succeeded in netting

another captive. No, he had escaped. They were sweeping whole continents with steel nets. But the Sirians had finally foiled even this ambitious scheme by simultaneously jumping over and under the nets and back in the soup again, carrying of course, the thousands of captive Terran troops and thus effectively holding Terran fire. Then there was silence for a while. At our distance the operation began to seem just a little ridiculous. Why not bargain for the return of the thirty-thousand and the handful of privateers who had started the fuss, by promising to forget all about their precious planet for once and for all?

Still, we couldn't communicate with the Sirians to strike any bargain. And if we could they would be fools to trust us. Given time, some bright Terran physio-physicist would figure out a way to blanket their gravicity glands en masse and that would be the end of the Sirians. And they undoubtedly knew it.

At least the Captive did. And he would smile at our hypothetical armistice to the strange war.

When the real armistice came, therefore, it was most unexpected. And, with usual Sirian ingenuity, unexpected. It was the day before the *Dorian* made her planetfall on Terra that we—and Terra—got the news:

One morning before daybreak the thirty-thousand captive troops were deposited simultaneously and in small groups at the portals of all twelve of the newly-domed Terran bases. A rapid count showed that they were unharmed and present to a man. Suspicious of a trick the Terran planetary commander had given orders to transport the thirty-thousand to deep space for interrogation. Space crews were relieved to make room for them and extra troops were mounted in the planetary bases. During the general alert that followed, air patrols swept the planet. Throughout the day Sirians were observed returning to their villages. By nightfall population density in the villages seemed about normal and all over the planet normal Sirian life had been resumed. Thus in twelve hours time, except for the wear and tear on Terran nerves and the garbled stories of thirty-thousand somewhat tired marines, Sirius-A was returned to the bucolic normalcy of forty days before. The whole bizarre episode might have been a dream.

There was but one exception to this startl-

ing return to normalcy: one hundred and fourteen private Terran citizens—miners, traders and pirates, by profession—were still missing. The best intelligence had it that they still floated, on the fuzzy arms of Sirians, in the clouds.

But still there was no communication from the quixotic defenders of the planet. Although now the implication was clear: The Terran army was tolerable—provided it stuck to its bases—but Terran privateers were not wanted on Sirius-A. And the penalty even clearer—swift and unpredictable, enormously troublesome but essentially harmless strikes at Terran nerves.

So be it.

The commander in chief of the task force at Sirius, on direct order from Imperial Headquarters on Terra we heard, put Sirius-A out-of-bounds to civilians indefinitely. The remains of the commercial fleet, hovering nervously but impatiently on Sirius-A's fringe these forty-odd days, dribbled off to some more hospitable sector of Terra's expanding universe.

That could have been all. The story of the Captive and his strange people could have ended here. And with few exceptions the crew of the *Dorian* thought it had; as we landed on Terra the ship fairly burst with the exulting news of the Sirian's apparent victory. It was not until we had actually landed, until the *Dorian's* cargo of scientists was discharged, and luggage in hand, we waited on the concrete landing apron for transportation to our homes, that we heard the news of Terra's reprisals on Sirius-A.

I was standing with Blake and Chin Lu at the time, a little distance from the tall figure of the Captive—waist-high in a cluster of armed marine guards. They were to take him, we understood, to the squat prison-ship standing a quarter mile off from the *Dorian*, there to be shipped to a top-secret laboratory where the mystery of his famous gravicity gland was to be puzzled out. As far as any of us knew, we would never see him again. The four of us were smiling goodbye when a junior officer hollered down from the main hatch two stories above our heads:

"Hey, you guys! We just bombed Sirius-A!"

"WHAT!" The cry came from a hundred scholarly throats.

Blake's hand tightened on my arm.

I could not take my eyes from the Cap-

tive's rigid face.

The excited shout over my head continued:

"Yeah! A hundred forty-six villages. Wiped out. Every village within ten kilometers of the domes. Cordon sanitaire, the report says. Sounds like just plain reprisals to me—"

There was more. I didn't listen. The marines guarding the Captive had begun to move. Blake's hand had numbed my arm from the elbow down. The Captive, his tall frame bent like a broken willow, was being pushed into an armored car. I caught his eye just before he disappeared inside. He was smiling.

Blake had gone limp beside me. And Chin Lu said, to both of us, I suppose:

"You see? He was smiling. So let us not despair, my friends. We have work to do."

Despite Chin's good advice, Terra did look ugly as I flew toward the university and home. Black, pocked, sprawling; cluttered with misshapen man-hills and the ceaseless trillions of man-bodies swarming over it: the Prime Globe, the center of the universe.

It was just under a month later that I saw the Captive again, for the last time.

It had been an exciting month for me. Back after my year's long trick with the military the academic atmosphere seemed Utopian. It was pleasant to apply one's brain to problems that did not directly implement murder and war. And it had been my good fortune to run onto a fascinating project soon after returning. Although it was not exactly a problem in "pure" physics, perhaps not even essentially a problem in physics at all, it captivated me entirely, and I had thrown myself into it with an abandon which Manazetti would surely have labeled cathartic. Well, perhaps it was. I fancied myself relieved of a burden of guilt I had carried since my college days. Since the day, in fact, when I had discovered in some out-of-print history of science the name Hiroshima.

I heard or saw little, in that month, of my former colleagues. Professor Culpepper, I learned from the newsvisor, had wrangled a rather high post in the government colonial service. This seemed odd; the old blighter had been so incorrigibly academic. But he seemed happy when I ran into him one day in Washington and explained it away with some embarrassed talk of "service" that fit him well enough.

# PSORIASIS

Whatever the extent, and it may be anything from two or three small spots on elbows and knees to large patches on the scalp, body and limbs. Psoriasis is always most distressing and embarrassing to the sufferer.

Psoriasis forms a white lustrous scale on a reddened area of skin. Both the scale and skin are always dry unless broken or brought away by too much force when scratching or combing.

In most cases the reddened skin is of a normal temperature and the scale thick and raised on the skin, especially on the scalp, elbows and knees. Where the skin is of finer texture as on the body, scaling takes place as thin flakes or a light powder. In severe cases all the scales—thick, thin, flake or powder—will come away in sheets.

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Blake, the physiologist, I heard of quite frequently. He had accepted, also unexpectedly, the headship of a hospital research group that served the black continent, Africa. Virtually quarantined on this miserably inadequate chunk of their native planet, the several billions of Terran black-fellows were subject to an unending series of plagues and pestilences. Blake, in his forthright way, was making a smell about it in all the visors.

And Chin Lu I heard from only once. He wrote me that he was returning to his native Asia and would be engaged, he said cryptically, on an "organizational problem of some anthropological interest.

Manazetti I neither saw nor heard from. I had a psychological problem of some moment at one time during that month, and remembering his quick wit I made inquiries. Except to learn from the War Department that he, too, had finished his tour of military duty and—like all scientists—had failed to re-enlist, I found no trace of Manazetti. I wondered occasionally what and how the dour psychologist thought about his suspect now.

From Sirius-A there was nothing but good news during that month. With characteristic patience the Sirians had accepted the wanton destruction of the twelve rings of villages around the Terran bases almost as if they had expected it. Thenceforward the armistice they had initiated by returning their thirty-thousand captives had remained unbroken by either side, the Sirians going on with the plain business of living, the Terrans strengthening their positions with unbelievable armor and making feverish preparations for the conquest of the galaxies beyond Sirius.

Here on Terra the home population

watched these developments nine light-years distant with declining interest. Conquest had become an old story to the Terran visor-watcher and it was not until the news was published that the original thirty-thousand ex-captives were being returned home, utterly unfit for soldiering, I imagined, that the public interest was again aroused in the Sirian campaign. Evidently half the fleet had been detached from Sirius to return them while the Home Fleet was now being sent to Sirius to relieve even the commanders in this strange and wearing test of Terran arms. For my part I watched these developments with considerable interest, feeling, oddly, that I had a personal stake in the outcome.

The thirty-thousand were two weeks on their way home and my own work was virtually completed when I received the call. I was to report to Washington immediately—a top-level conference concerning the disposition of the Sirian captive, and that he would be present. More, the top-secret visogram did not say. My heart filled with prospect of seeing him again and I grabbed an aircab from the physics building roof. I was in plenty of time for the 5:30 Washington rocket and I stopped in the airport waiting room to hear the 5:15 news. As soon as it began I stepped to the bookstall and buried my face in someone's *Pocket History of the Empire* in order to conceal my excitement. Above the noise of the home-going crowd this is what I heard:

"Africans revolt! Upstart union calls general strike."

"Jailed spokesmen deny charges of conspiracy."

"Chinese delegation unexpectedly withdraws from Imperial Assembly. No explanation given."

"Sporadic riots noted in Moscow and Berlin. Imperial Police report no cause for alarm."

"The Secretary for the Imperial Colonial Service reports temporary breakdown in over-space administration. Cause or causes unknown."

There was more; but I had to catch my rocket. Finding a seat I found myself grinning foolishly. Everything had become clear. Blake. Culpepper. Even Chin Lu. I wondered excitedly when my turn would come. And Manazetti. What was Tom Manazetti slated for?

There were little knots of Amerterrans

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FLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

on the streets as I taxied over Washington. I couldn't hear what they were shouting about and the cab driver didn't know. But the noise had grown to a city-wide rumble by the time we reached the first ring of sentries around the Imperial Mansion.

Inside it was cool and silent and I had time to collect my thoughts as the uniformed page led me down long carpeted corridors to the conference room.

"You're a bit late, sir," the page whispered — sympathetically, I thought — and opened the door. Straightening my shoulders I took a deep breath and went in.

The room was a small one for the imposing company it held. There was scarcely room for the large table and perhaps a dozen chairs. There was one door, flanked by two armed guards. And one tall window opening onto a balcony.

"Hello, Grant," someone said.

It was Culpepper. I took a seat beside him.

"Hello," I said. And looked around the table.

Culpepper was on my left. On my right sat Blake. I smiled at him. He grinned back, a strange, exultant grin. Staring peacefully into space just beyond the physiologist was Chin Lu. He had not seen me and my gaze moved on around the table. Manazetti was not there.

At the head of the long table sat the great wrinkled head and wizened figure of the aged Emperor-President, Christopher Smith. He had been emperor when my father was born, and would probably be emperor—if his doctors didn't abandon him --when my sons died. I passed over his face quickly for I was a trifle unnerved at being face-to-face with the classroom portrait of my school days.

Strung along the table across from us were four uniformed men: Carlsen, Chief of Defense; Van Hooten, Chief of the Colonial Service; Abercrombie, Commander of the Terran Marines; and Manilowski, Chief of the Imperial Secret Police. I knew them all—by television. But I had never expected to be sitting across the table from any one of them, let alone all four.

The Captive was not present.

"Gentlemen" purred the century old larynx at the end of the table. The conference had begun.

"Gentlemen, we have called you together tonight to discuss the Sirian captive, and . . . well, your relationships with this enemy

of the Empire. Certain events have brought to our attention your . . . to put it bluntly, your treasonous behavior in the month since your return to Earth."

The voice paused for a moment and from the soft purr of a gently reproachful friend it became the rasp of hate:

"This is your trial. Unless you can explain your actions to my personal satisfaction, the four of you will be shot in the morning. And gentlemen, I am hard to satisfy."

And again softly:

"But while you are still alive these officers and myself should like to know the nature of the influence . . . perhaps, hypnosis, this enemy spy has held over you. You see, it will gladden our memories of you, gentlemen, to know that it was *his* will and not your own which prompted you to these traitorous acts."

Suddenly and shockingly, Culpepper laughed.

"Why, my dear fellow," he chuckled, "do you find it so difficult to imagine that a man could *want* to be rid of you? All by himself? You and your brass-button boys?"

One of the guards in a spasm of well-trained fury unholstered his side arm. But the Emperor-President raised his hand. The gunman stopped as if struck.

"Go on, Professor Culpepper. Am I to understand that you have wanted to be a traitor? For a long time?"

"For a very long time indeed," the old biologist admitted cheerily. "You see, like many a loyal subject whose eyes you have permitted to remain open and whose mind you have permitted to be trained—for the purposes of your own, no doubt—I have long been aware of the foul stink our great Empire makes in the Universe. But like all your subjects I had no idea that I—nor anyone, for that matter—could set it right. So treason, as you call it, was pretty much out of the question. Until—"

"Until the Sirian prisoner showed you how it could be done?"

"Exactly."

Rigidly the great head turned to the chief of the Colonial Service.

"Tell us, sir, Dr. Culpepper's crime."

Crisply, the story rang out:

"Two days ago, your Imperial Presidency, an order came to my desk addressed to all colonial administrators throughout the Empire. It was signed by this man, who



was, unfortunately, given a post of authority in my office. The order instructed all administrators to disband the colonial police, to turn over all arms and monies to native authorities, and to liquidate their installations and report home to Terra."

"And this order was sent?"

"Sent and countermanded immediately."

"But?"

"The countermanding order has not yet been acknowledged. For some reason all official communication with the colonies has broken down. But we have dispatched military detachments to each of the colonies. Insurrections, if any, will be summarily—"

"That's enough, Van Hooten. Professor Culpepper?"

"Yes?"

"Will you be good enough to tell us how this last little detail was arranged?"

Culpepper smiled and began packing his pipe. When he had finished he looked up and said:

"No."

"Well, never mind," the voice continued. "It is of no great importance. But I am distinctly curious, Dr. Culpepper, to know how you expect this momentary fiasco in the Colonial Service to set right the ills of the universe you spoke so feelingly of a moment ago. A fiasco that will cost you your life, by the way," he added genially. "Would you care to explain your foolhardiness, professor?"

"Willingly," the crusty old biologist said. "I have seen some equations that told me that the effect of my little blunder—together with certain other blunders that I did not then know about—would be just what you hear outside."

For a moment we all listened to the mumble of the awakened city beyond the window. Then the soft voice purred on:

"And these equations, professor? The spy showed you these equations?"

"The Captive," Culpepper corrected. And turning to me he grinned: "Damned if they didn't work, too!"

"Silence!" gritted the guard. From the corner of my eye I saw the nozzle of his blaster nudging Culpepper's ear.

The biologist leaned slowly back and looked at the white fury in the face of the guard. "I am an old man, son," Culpepper began quietly. "And my work is—"

The *spppt* of the blaster finished his sentence. It was set on short range. And made no mess. Culpepper's hand brushed

my knee as his headless body slid gently under the table.

"Dr. Lu?" the voice said placidly.

"Yes, Imperial Presidency? I await your command." There was just the slightest tremor in the young anthropologist's voice.

I was, of course, more frightened than I had ever been in my life. I had never seen a man murdered before. And to have that man a friend and his corpse within reach of my toe, well—But I forced myself to attend to Lu's story, for in it would lie, perhaps, the clue to my own conduct—perhaps even my life.

His story was much like Culpepper's—the accusation and easy confession. Lu had instigated a plot among Asiatic civil servants. Passive resistance to Imperial demands. The withdrawal of the Asian delegation was to be the spark. Already the government was completely decentralized. Yes, he too had seen the equations. Had, in fact, helped the Captive prepare them. And he admitted digging up the values of the hundred of sociologic variables the Captive needed to make his predictions.

"I am a social scientist, Imperial Presidency," Lu concluded. "For many years I have dreamed of such equations. Of discovering the under-lying laws of humanoid association. And, like my late distinguished colleague, I have long been aware of the good uses to which such knowledge could be put. It was a great privilege to assist the Captive with his work."

He was not, of course, addressing "his Imperial Presidency" at all, but us, his friends, beside him at that grim table. But due to his careful courtesy Chin Lu kept his head and it was Blake's turn.

I was afraid for Blake. His now-famous rashness would surely deal him Culpepper's fate before he finished his first angry sentence. But with a cold scorn, that was most unusual for my hot-headed friend, he got through his "confession" with the greatest dispatch, answering the Emperor's further questions with monosyllables if at all.

Blake, curiously, had known nothing about the "equations" the others had spoken of. He had talked with the Captive, he said, about the "racial question." No, the Captive had not urged him to incite revolt among the Terran Negroes. He had merely pointed out, in answer to Blake's own questions, the inherent instability of



the centuries'-old segregation policy. A push here, a shove there and the whole shabby structure would crumble. As for Blake's motive? It was simple. His year's contact with the military had focused his old hate of cruelty; two weeks contact with the dark continent had focused his love. He had gone there, he said, merely to serve. It was not until later that the idea of revolt fully ripened in him. Then? Then it was easy. The people had long been ready. The far-flung organization of the hospital research service which he headed made it possible to touch off the entire continent at once. That was all he would say and that was enough.

"And now, Professor Grant," the voice said.

I nodded and waited, resolved to play the game stubbornly.

"You are this year's President of the Imperial Association of Atomic and Gravitic Physicists and Engineers."

"That's right."

"This organization has traditionally served, with my approval, the recreational and . . . social needs of your distinguished membership, Dr. Grant. Is that not so?"

I nodded. The annual convention of

IAAGPE was invariably an Empire-rocking event of drunken foolery. In my memory the organization had served no other purpose. Manazetti had spoken sourly of our special guilt and hence our special need for group catharsis.

"Recently, however," the voice continued. "The Association has been engaged in a new activity. Messages have been interchanged among the membership with unusual frequency; ever since your return from Sirius, in fact, Professor."

"Specially big convention next month," I explained shortly.

"Yes, This has been the apparent subject of your correspondence. But—"

"But what?"

"But you, too, Grant, have been a confidant of the Sirian spy!"

Ah, then they did not know! They merely suspected.

"Yes, like my friends here, I found the Captive a most entertaining conversationalist."

"You also helped him solve certain equations, I believe."

"Puzzles," I corrected happily. "He had some interesting puzzles in matrix algebra. I showed him how to work them."

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"Indeed, professor. You will, of course, be shot for that. But let us come to the point. How did your conversations with the captive affect your activity in the IAAGPE?"

His voice had become a trifle unpleasant and I foolishly allowed myself a little irritation in my answer.

"Really, Mr. Smith! You don't expect me to tell you, do you? If you know, I should be a fool to lie to you. If you do not know, I should be an even bigger fool to tell you."

"Quite," the voice said gently. "Therefore, professor, I will tell you that we do know. That we know enough to have taken the entire membership of the IAAGPE into custody. As you left your office this afternoon your entire staff was arrested. And from Sol to Sirius there is not a physicist or technician at large. You see, Professor Grant, there were not so many of you that we could not take . . . shall I say, precautions?"

I will have to admit that I was, for a moment, taken aback. A young assistant of mine, a splendid girl, was to have been married in the morning.

"I see," I said. And let it go at that.

"If you choose not to tell us, Professor Grant, the details of your plans with the Sirian spy, it is quite within our power to liquidate the entire profession."

I laughed at this.

"And do you really think that you could run the Empire without physical science, Mr. Smith? Without gravitic power? Without atomic armaments? Without communications? Really, old fellow, your threat is just a bit unreal!"

"We should not, of course, be so foolish as to kill you all at once," he smiled. "And we would, of course, stop killing you as soon as you—or anyone, for that matter—gives us the information we require. Do not mistake us for butchers, Dr. Grant."

"And if I—or anyone—does *not* confess, Mr. Smith? Or if, confessing to save our necks, we refuse to co-operate any further in running your Empire for you . . . what of my question then?"

"We will train new, loyal technicians to operate our physical plant."

"And who would teach them?"

"There are books, professor. You have not burned the books, I trust?"

I grinned back at him. "Tell me, Imperial Presidency, have you ever tried to read one

of those books? On transtemporal sub-nuclear gravitics, say?"

The wrinkled head turned slowly on its fragile neck and peered thoughtfully at the Chief of Imperial Police.

"The professor is toying with us, Malinowski. Have the Sirian spy brought in. And, oh yes, prepare Dr. Thomas Manazetti. We may need him soon." And turning back to me: "Dr. Grant will be delighted to see his old friend again."

They wheeled the Captive in. He was sitting in a hospital chair, his once lithe body huddled strangely under a sheetlike garment. Two armed attendants in the white, starched uniforms of the medical corps pushed him to a spot just in front of the tall window where the rumble grew with every minute. I allowed myself one brief glance and the hint of a smile and then stared studiously at my folded hands.

In that glance I had seen enough to stiffen the somewhat wobbly resolution of an hour before. For the sheet covered but did not hide a half dozen boxlike lumps on the Captive's limbs and torso that could mean only one thing: visceral extrusion, a medical research technique developed and abandoned some twenty years before. Except for use on volunteer condemned criminals, I corrected silently.

Rising hideously from the Captive's shaved white skull was the one visible example of this unholy but tremendously effective technique: guyed securely in a steel and plastic brace holding his neck and shoulders immobile, slender silver rods supported an ascending series of silver trays. On these trays, in ghastly array, lay the Captive's brains, ingeniously extracted from the yawning hole atop his shaven skull and laid out carefully under glass—for observation, and experimentation.

I must have shuddered a little for I felt Blake's hand on my arm.

"Easy does it, Grant. It doesn't hurt, y'know."

I nodded and heard the voice saying softly, as if from a great distance:

"Rest assured, gentlemen, that the Sirian spy is still in full possession of his . . . rather remarkable faculties. And it pleases me to report that more loyal technicians than you, gentlemen, have discovered the secret of the Sirian gravitic gland. And how to counteract it. A fleet especially equipped with dampening transmitters is on its way to Sirius-A at this moment."

I stole a second look at the Captive. Under his hideous harness his eyes were smiling at us.

"Does that displease you, Dr. Grant?" the voice continued. "For if it does not, we have still other proofs of the failure of the cause you so foolishly fought for, Professor Grant!" the voice insisted.

Then quietly, steadily, from the all-but-disemboweled carcass in the wheel chair came the familiar musical tones of the Captive's voice:

"Be still, old man. You have asked many questions. Now, I shall answer them. But I wish first to talk with my friends. You have, as I suggested brought them here. That is good. Now, only be quiet and you will learn what you wish to know. About my people and our plans for you."

The big head at the end of the table quivered and then subsided. And with it, as if controlled by it, the arms of the two gunmen behind us also quivered and subsided.

"Proceed, spy."

"Professor Grant. Chin Lu. And the volatile Blake," the Captive said, looking at each of us in turn. "It is good to see you all once more. But where is Culpepper? And Manazetti?"

We told him about Culpepper.

He nodded. "He was too happy to fear them. But Manazetti?"

"They're bringing him later," I said.

"Yes. They would save him," he said. "Until the last." His gray eyes flickered for a moment before he went on. "But we have done our jobs well, have we not, my friends? The unrest grows hourly. But do not let it disturb you. The awakened passions of your people will turn as quickly to peace within three days, I should judge. With us or without us," he smiled.

"While there is time, therefore, let me answer your unspoken questions. Let me fill out the half-truths and unravel the lies I have been forced to tell you about my people and myself. You have guessed much, of course, but there is much, much more to tell. Bear with me."

We settled back, great-head and his four brassy-eyed lieutenants forgotten, and listened.

"Let me begin with myself," the Captive said. "Among my people I am not, as I informed you, a dancer. I am a designer, an inventor. I suppose you would call me an 'engineer.' But the materials which I deal

with are not physical, as among your engineers, but social. They are the habits, customs, values of my people—with whom and for whom I worked. Not without some small success.

"Among my people such social engineers as myself are commonplace—as common as doctors or physical engineers among you. And in our designs and inventions—even our occasional repairs—we follow closely the work of our great scholars, just as your engineers follow the basic work of men like Grant, here. But among us scholarship has a different bent. For many millennia the intelligence of our race has been focused inward by our environment, even as yours has been turned outward by the stars. And for as long as we have known science it has been a science of what you would call biosocial and perhaps, psychological phenomena. As with you, this focusing and gradual accretion of intelligence has been rewarded; we have made many mighty discoveries concerning social forms and processes, until now we are in possession of the basic laws which govern all human, and perhaps, all humanoid, association. Just as your scientists have unlocked the secret of the atom, and hence all matter, our scientists have unlocked the secret of all individual attraction and repulsion, and hence all societies.

"As a result of applying these discoveries to ourselves, over the centuries, social and personal life among us has become as stable, satisfying, and essentially as efficient as one of your ingenious physical machines. In a word, we have erected a social structure that works.

"We are not, of course, entirely without the trauma, pain, and conflict that is so rampant among you Terrans. We are not utopian, nor do we want to be. Even less do we claim that the simple social forms we have developed from our own peculiar genes on our own peculiar planet is best for all humanoid life, everywhere. But our social life works very handsomely for us. And what trauma, frustration, and conflict we do experience is contributory to the development of the harmonious personality, not destructive of him. Consequently, it was with no little disturbance that we observed the pathetic symptoms of blustering cruelty and blind authoritarianism among your people when they swarmed down out of the cloud upon us in their beautiful machines.

"We did not relish exposing the delicate

equilibrium of our social forms to brute forces entirely outside our control. Nor did we fancy being enslaved by a horde of wonderfully clever but incredibly childish mechanics. And I am sorry, but this, you see, was what you seemed to us to be."

He paused for a moment and looked at us. To discover whether he had offended us, I suppose. Finding nothing worthy of comment or apology the Captive went on.

"The threat of your really quite awesome weapons, disturbed us at first. But then we discovered, wholly by inference, the rather ingenuous formula by which you guided those weapons. What your soldiers call 'military strategy'. From that time onward our most skillful engineers manipulated the thought-patterns of your commanders simply by keeping your behavior contingent on our own. Thus, although quite weaponless, with a few small sacrifices we were able to preclude your plans of conquest.

"At that time, perhaps one week after your original landings, we devised a plan of our own. A plan of conquest, if you like, for there seemed no alternative but to do battle with you. Though not, of course, on your own terms, nor with your weapons. Our weapons, as you have already guessed, were social. And I was one of them.

"A social saboteur was needed. And, moreover a saboteur who could work in a social milieu that was entirely foreign to us. Among several hundred volunteers—scholars, inventors, and engineers—I was selected. I suppose for the bizarre designs and social arabesques for which I had become rather well known in the profession. It was to be my job to destroy, if necessary; to renovate, if possible; or to render at least harmless, the social system which threatened us. It was a tricky and exciting assignment and I was, I suppose, the most envied one of my profession when I slept through the alarm that day in the fifteenth village you attacked."

The Captive paused for a moment and smiled. I could not resist asking:

"But weren't you appalled, man, at the terrific responsibility that devolved on you? After all, the safety—perhaps even the survival—of your entire race lay pretty much with you."

"Not at all, Grant," the Captive answered. "The fate of *your* people lay with me. The fate of mine were in the sober, vastly more competent hands of the thousand skilled scientists who were to study and inculcate our captives. You see we could not depend

on just one weapon. We meant to have thirty thousand others. Thirty thousand Terran marines. Through them, no matter how I failed or succeeded, our own people would at least be free of you forever. You see, they were to be recalled, as I remember the plan, and once on Terra—" His voice trailed off and glancing sharply up the long table, asked: "I assume that this has been done?"

"Nonsense!" the Chief of Defense exploded. He had evidently been wanting to say it for a long time. "Sirius-A will fall within the week! Your own glands, spy, have shown us how to deal with your people!"

"You do not know, then, that your own fleet has been overpowered? That it is now manned and commanded by the Terran soldiers we captured and indoctrinated for forty successive days? That it is now on its way to Terra?"

There was a moment's absolute silence during which you could almost hear the military mind grinding.

"Nonsense," Carlsen said again, but cautiously. "Of course, they are on their way. And by my order."

"Suitably predicted," the Captive smiled and turned back to us. "You see, Grant, my responsibility to my *own* people was not so very great after all. These trained soldiers of yours are prepared to capture and disarm Terra and patrol it for a decade. Unless—"

The Chief of Defense was now on his feet and shouting something at the Captive about the impregnability of Terra's defenses. But I knew a little more about those defenses than poor Carlsen knew and I was more interested in the Captive's "unless."

"Unless what?" I asked somewhat uneasily.

"Unless you and I, Grant, and our three friends, here, have succeeded in our task—as I think we have." He listened intently to the sounds outside the window, as if to gauge their intensity. "Yes," he murmured, "I think we have."

"Then it was your task, Captive," Chin Lu said slowly. "To save us for ourselves. While if you failed—?"

"Your own fleet, and Grant, would have pulled your rather nasty teeth. You see—"

I sat back, relieved. Then the sound of the voice, this long time silent, interrupted the Captive.

"Professor Grant," it purred. But there was a new note in it, as of slow strangling.

"Yes, Mr. Smith," I answered, not unkindly.

"Will you tell me what your Association of Physicists has done to us?"

"Certainly, sir. I see, now, that there can be no great harm—"

"Tell me!"

"Why, only that we have disarmed all radioactives. All atomic and gravitic weapons have been rewired so that they are at present inoperative. And so that they cannot again be tampered with without exploding."

"All?" he asked.

"All. In every ship and ammo dump from Sol to Sirius, sir, the radioactives are utterly useless. There are weekly inspections, you know," I explained kindly. "Only qualified personnel. It was a simple task to arrange, you see. But I'm afraid it will be mighty difficult to undo." I tried very hard not to grin at him, but a wee smile did break through.

But it didn't matter. Thin parchment lids were sliding down over the ancient eyes.

"I see," he said.

And I really think he did.

But not Carlsen. The big man was on his feet again and raging.

"Look here, Grant! If you're telling the truth I'll have every scientist's head rolling by morning! I'll court-martial every ordnance officer in the fleet! I'll—"

"Sit down, Carlsen," the Emperor-President said wearily.

In the silence, Chin Lu remembered his question.

"You were telling us, Captive, that it was to be your job to save us for ourselves—"

"If possible," the Captive corrected.

"To learn about us, the sources of our—what you have called, infantile behavior—and if possible, to invent and suggest remedies that would attack these troubles at the roots?"

"That's roughly what I set out to do, Chin. But I soon found that the hopeful, recreative forces in your society had become so hopelessly bound up in the static and even degenerative forces that I saw that it would be necessary to level, so to speak, the superstructure of your culture in order to free the positive forces latent in it. Do I make myself clear? Your language, I fear does not lend itself to an exact, scientific exposition of these processes."

"I think I see what you mean. Go on."

"Well, after many weeks of careful

analysis I located the weak spots in this superstructure. You, Chin, knew of one. Blake, another. Culpepper, a third. You will observe that they were all three in the authority-system of the Terran society, its weakest dimension. The combined effect of your three pushes in these sectors should reduce the 'Empire' to a state of apparent 'chaos' in a dozen hours social time. Then, and only then, can the creative forces emerge. And from the sound of things, social time is running fast. His eyes flicked to the draped window behind him.

For a moment we all listened. Then, addressing itself to the Emperor-President, the Captive's voice continued, low against the muted howling of the crowds outside.

"You see, old man, the mighty state of which you have long been the honored head was, at bottom, as fragile as a house of paper. By your strength of will and through the desperate support of a few small groups within the population—principally the men of money and the military—this house was held together, long after it should have collapsed from the creaking anachronism of its several members. But its foundations were rotten. It was built with blind hope on footings of human terror and misery. And in the great shocking inconsistencies and contradictions between its warring parts, this house has left its mark upon the most unfortunate who live in it. For the sensitive man there is little beyond shame and guilt to be found in it. For the man of energy and ambition, there is first the ceaseless frustration of large goals denied, later the inevitable pursuit of the hollow goals: money, fame, luxury, or power—that make a mockery of ambition. For the strong, there is only the shame of easy victory. For the weak, only terror. For the

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stupid, unspeakable drudgery. For the intelligent, the perversion of wit to witless ends. And for the slaves—the humans who live in the hundred kinds of bondage your blind urge to Progress has invented, except a small handful of native, white male Terrans who found a kind of dignity in their birthright—life in this paper house of yours was a parade of little hurts of deep indignities, denying to nine-tenths of human nature what it, like all life, most craves: the dignity of self-possession. Your house is falling, old man. Human nature deserves a sounder, fairer structure in its place."

Christopher Smith opened his eyes and peered silently down the long table at the misshapen gray figure in the wheel chair. Then he cocked his great head a trifle as if to listen. For a moment the sounds outside the great window had died down.

"You speak very eloquently, Mr. Captive. I wonder that you know so much about us."

He placed his hands on the table as if to rise. The two guards jumped to his sides. He hesitated a moment, then, waving them away, he turned once more to face us. His face gleamed oddly.

"There is just one more thing, gentlemen," he said with his old, sure softness. "The case of Professor of Psychology, Manazetti. Bring the professor in, boys."

Eagerly, I turned in my chair to face the door. I was not prepared for the sight that greeted me as the guard swung it open.

Braced on the arms of two hospital attendants, arms bound to his sides in the sleeves of a strait jacket, eyes haggard and chin rhythmically quivering, stood Tom Manazetti. The tunnel openings that were his eyes reached out for mine and he said:

"Well, well, If it isn't old Atomics Grant—"

He lunged for me and if the alert attendants had not caught him he would have fallen into my lap. I was on my feet and shouting, I think at the implacable Mr. Smith before they had Tom on his feet again.

"What is the meaning of this, sir? What have you done to him?"

Grinning slyly the death's-head answered calmly.

"We found the professor in a Venusian asylum for the criminally insane, Dr. Grant. You might ask your Sirian friend how he got there."

Bewildered I turned to face the Captive.

He had risen from his wheel chair, with what effort I do not know, and was staring silently at the beaten Manazetti. There was a look of anguish on his face and for a long moment he ignored my pleading stare. Then he turned to me, to all of us, for Chin Lu and Blake had risen beside me, and said:

"This is the final chapter of my story, friends. I will tell you, now, why you did what you did and why you will continue to do what you will do. And"—his voice became almost inaudibly soft—"why Tom Manazetti is what he is."

His almost empty body seemed to sag a little and he reached with one slim, gray hand for the table's edge. Though I could not take my gaze from the Captive's face, out of the corner of my eye I saw Manazetti, erect now, in the arms of his attendants, but staring at the Captive with open hatred written across his face. Steadying himself, the Captive continued in the old, bell-like voice:

"You know now, my friends, of my skill—no, my people's skill—in sociology. But we are also, by your standards, master psychologists. I am not trained in this field. Still, like all my people, I know something of the art of persuasion. It was, as you know, my task to persuade you of the rightness of my cause. To enlist you in the fight for your own maturity. But I did more than that. In effect, I forced you to do what have you done. No," he raised his hand against the surprise sweeping across our faces. "No, it was not hypnosis. Far deeper and surer than mere hypnosis was the technique I used. I located in each of you three—and in the gallant Culpepper—the dominant motive, the mainsprings of your personalities. And then I hitched this motive to the job I—and you—wanted done."

"In you, Blake, I found it simply and directly. Since a childhood spent with a suffering invalid mother, you have hated pain with a depth that was, and is still, overpowering. By way of adjustment you had found a way-of-life, in scholarship, that kept you out of suffering's view. But—and this, you others must have noticed in him—the slightest hint of suffering intruding this quiet world of his would transform him utterly from the pacific, quiet-spoken man he ordinarily was to a wild-eyed crusader. I had merely to send you, Blake, to the miserable continent and the rest was inevitable."

"In Culpepper, it was not so simple. A



good man, with a good man's weak stomach for evil, he was nevertheless so perfectly adjusted to his chosen life that for a while I despaired of unseating him from it. But at last I uncovered the motive that would pry him loose. He had, you remember, the biologist's fascination with life. It was his profound conviction that each life form had its separate destiny, that no man ought to tamper with this destiny. I inquired a little further and discovered, as you might expect, that Terra's brutal treatment of subject races in all parts of the universe had offended him deeply. So deeply that he found it difficult to talk about. Accordingly, I examined with him the sociologic consequences of upsetting the colonial service and finding them auspicious, sent him off. As a scientist he was of course, quite fascinated with my formulae, and this was a secondary motive—he wanted to know if they would work. Finally, being a completely fearless man the adventure held no threat for him. And would not, I imagine, even had he known its bitter end.

"With Chin Lu, here, the motive was quite unsuspected. He is obviously, of course, a social scientist and possessed of his fair share of the social scientist's deep longing—particularly defensive among you who have no real social science—to bring power and nicety into his backward discipline. But the astonishing thing about Chin was that he wanted nothing else. I had learned to look for deep, obsessive motives among you Terrans, hidden chains upon your reason. But in Chin, all was as it seemed to be. He has lived in your fractured world and remained whole. Once I discovered this about him, my job was done. I simply talked to him as if he had been a rather bright Sirian schoolboy. He learned very quickly and was, of course, agreeable to everything I suggested. Asia was selected for the scene of his operations simply because he could work with Asia. He did very well. May I suggest that Chin Lu be regarded as the first Terran social engineer?"

He looked fondly at the young anthropologist for a moment and turned to me.

"Grant," he said, with a faint smile, "did the most magnificent job of all. And the simplest, from my point of view, to arrange. In you, as you yourself know so very well, motive was a simple matter of your ancient wish to free yourself from the guilt you thought you carried. A guilt which you shoulder, with quite unnecessary generosity, I assure you, for your whole profession.

And one which you have now erased almost singlehandedly. You see, gentlemen, Grant was his own inventor, here. In the field of physics I am, as you know, too ignorant to be a designer of effective sabotage. But Grant, who had often toyed with the idea of non-co-operation with the military—whom he had unwillingly served, either directly or indirectly, throughout his entire professional career—Grant, I say, needed only to be assured that this was the *time* to unload his guilt. The way it could be done was clear enough to him. Quite in the spirit of hypothesis, then, Grant and I solved a few predictive equations as to the effects of general physical sabotage on the social world at this time. I could see he was intrigued with my predictions and I let it go at that. You know the rest.

"Now, Manazetti—" he began. And then fell silent. There was a look of panic in his eyes as they flashed from face to face. Poor fellow! I believe it was the first time in his serene life that he had felt the tearing wounds of internal conflict. He struggled visibly for a moment and then began again.

"Manazetti was the most knowing Terran of you all. Almost from the very moment I talked with him, I sensed his deep insight

## IN TIMES TO COME

A new author, Jim Brown, takes the lead in next month's issue with a decidedly *different* yarn entitled:

### "THE EMISSARY"

This intriguing tale tackles the problem of making a militaristic, totalitarian absolutism, armed with fleets of inter-stellar battle cruisers, start playing marbles and study techniques in raising prettier flowers!

## ALSO OTHER COMPLETE SHORT STORIES BY ACE S-F WRITERS OF AMERICA

LOOK OUT FOR THE JANUARY ISSUE OF

## ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

ON SALE DEC. 20th

and—yes suspicion—of me. He knew, you see, what no one else would believe. That unarmed and alone though I was, I was—or could be—master of you all.

"Tom didn't want to be mastered. I struggled to find in him a motive that would bring his keen mind and boundless energy over to our side. But all I found in Tom was a deep, empty, pathetic insecurity that was entirely new to me. He was afraid of everything and everybody, most of all, himself. There was no out-going motive, no wish to save, or cure, or help. Fear and self-defense were the dominant themes of his personality. So there was nothing to tie my message to. Nothing. And, though I could not be sure that he meant us any harm, he knew too much about our plans. I began to look around for a way to keep him occupied for one month's time."

The Captive was looking down, now, at his slender hands. His voice sounded once or twice, as if it were about to break. But it did not and he went on.

"I tried money, sex, power. None of these caught on. I tried to think of some simple crime that I could lead him to. But he wanted nothing, except security, which he felt he had. Then one day I discovered an old hate, deep within him. A boyhood friend, now married and living, he thought, as a trader on Venus, had done him some great injustice. I do not remember the details, except that it involved a girl. I was amazed to learn, that as we talked about this ancient hurt, all of Tom's fears seemed to hinge on this event. Scarcely knowing what I did—for we on Sirius-A know nothing of psychosis—I felt that here was something that might keep Tom occupied for a month or more, and I aggravated the tension of his hate for this man by every psychological trick I knew. When we landed on Terra I was satisfied with the job I had done. Tom lived in a phantasy world of revenge."

The Captive took a very deep breath. Then he finished:

"I do not know what I expected him to do. Search out and insult his old friend, perhaps. I even considered the possibility that he might strike him. But I did not know that he could—kill."

I could not bring myself to speak. Beside me, Blake asked shortly:

"You turned him into a killer?"

The Captive nodded.

One of the attendants, dropped Tom's

arm to light a cigarette, and getting our attention, said casually, nastily, out of the corner of his mouth:

"He killed five people. This other guy and his wife and three kids."

There was a grunt, the sudden pound of feet and I felt rather than saw Tom's hurtling, canvas-clad shoulder smash into the slender, lumpy figure of the Captive. There was a tinkle of silver and breaking glass and the empty gray pelt bent softly to the floor. His viscera, unshelved, lay all around him.

Looking at those curious objects on the floor and then at Tom, quiet-eyed now with his murder, I heard the Captive's voice stirring in my memory:

". . . And they fight. In youth, when pride is precious and unproved, for the dignity of self-possession."

Tom possessed himself. Now.

There was an angry mass shout at the window, louder, now, than before.

Blake was walking across the room. Half-dazed but curious I watched him. Now, he was stepping over the Captive's scattered body. Now, to the tall window and throwing back the heavy drape, he opened it. Half-attentive, I listened to his voice cutting into the tumult outside:

"The Emperor-President has resigned. Africa will be healed. Tomorrow there will be an Empire-wide referendum. The colonial peoples will participate. The Sirian war is over. Now, go home and think about the kind of world you want to live in."

He said each short sentence very loudly and very slowly, with long spaces in between. Blake then shut the window, and pulling back the drape, stood motionless.

After a long while there was a murmur behind me. Then I heard the voice of the Emperor say:

"Go home, Abercrombie. All of you, go home. You heard the professor."

They went.

Manazetti left with his keepers, still peaceful-eyed.

The hospital attendants made a stab at gathering up the Captive on his several trays. I growled something and they left by the same door.

Finally, we were alone. The death's-head at the end of the long empty table and I. And together we listened. Silently listened to the faint, dying jubilation outside. And to the bell-shaped echoes graven on the walls.

# ALL THE WAY BACK

By MICHAEL SHAARA

*There is one circumstance under which it is exceedingly difficult to establish communication with another individual—or race. A new author considers a point that could make technically adequate communications quite futile . . .*

Great were the Antha, so reads the One Book of History, greater perhaps than any of the Galactic Peoples, and they were brilliant and fair, and their reign was long, and in all things they were great and proud, even in the manner of their dying—

*Preface to Loab: History of The Master Race.*

THE huge red ball of a sun hung glowing upon the screen.

Jansen adjusted the traversing knob, his face tensed and weary. The sun swung off the screen to the right, was replaced by the live black of space and the million speckled lights of the farther stars. A moment later the sun glided silently back across the screen and went off at the left. Again there was nothing but space and the stars.

"Try it again?" Cohn asked.

Jansen mumbled: "No. No use," and he swore heavily. "Nothing. Always nothing. Never a blessed thing."

Cohn repressed a sigh, began to adjust the controls.

In both of their minds was the single, bitter thought that there would be only one more time, and then they would go home. And it was a long way to come to go home with nothing.

When the controls were set there was nothing left to do. The two men walked slowly aft to the freeze room. Climbing up painfully on to the flat steel of the beds, they lay back and waited for the mechanism to function, for the freeze to begin.

Turned in her course, the spaceship bore off into the open emptiness. Her ports were thrown open, she was gathering speed as she moved away from the huge red star.

The object was sighted upon the last leg of the patrol, as the huge ship of the Galactic Scouts came across the edge of the Great Desert of the Rim, swinging wide in a long slow curve. It was there on the massometer as a faint *blip*, and, of course, the word went directly to Roymer.

"Report," he said briefly, and Lieutenant Goladan—a young and somewhat pompous Higiandrian—gave the Higiandrian equivalent of a cough and then reported.

"Observe," said Lieutenant Goladan, "that it is not a meteor, for the speed of it is much too great."

Roymer nodded patiently.

"And again, the speed is decreasing"—Goladan consulted his figures—"at the rate of twenty-four dines per segment. Since the orbit appears to bear directly upon the star Mina, and the decrease in speed is of a certain arbitrary origin, we must conclude that the object is a spaceship."

Roymer smiled.

"Very good, lieutenant." Like a tiny nova, Goladan began to glow and expand.

A good man, thought Roymer tolerantly, his is a race of good men. They have been two million years in achieving space flight; a certain adolescence is to be expected.

"Would you call Mind-Search, please?" Roymer asked.

Goladan sped away, to return almost immediately with the heavy-headed non-human Trian, chief of the Mind-Search Section.

Trian cocked an eyelike thing at Roymer, with grave inquiry.

"Yes, commander?"

The thought message popped clearly into Roymer's mind. Those of Trian's race had no vocal apparatus. In the aeon-long history of their race it had never been needed.

"Would you stand by please?" said Roymer, and he pressed a button and spoke to the engaging crew. "Prepare for alien contact."

The abrupt change in course was noticeable only on the viewplate, as the stars slid silently by. The patrol vessel veered off, swinging around and into the desert, settled into a parallel course with the strange new craft, keeping a discreet distance of—approximately—a light-year.

The scanners brought the object into immediate focus, and Goladan grinned with pleasure. A spaceship, yes, Alien, too. Undoubtedly a primitive race. He voiced these thoughts to Roymer.

"Yes," the commander said, staring at the strange, small, projectilelike craft.

"Primitive type. It is to be wondered what they are doing in the desert."

Goladan assumed an expression of intense curiosity.

"Trian," said Roymer pleasantly, "would you contact?"

The huge head bobbed up and down once and then stared into the screen. There was a moment of profound silence. Then Trian turned back to stare at Roymer, and there was a distinctly human expression of surprise in his eyelike things.

"Nothing," came the thought. "I can detect no presence at all."

Roymer raised an eyebrow.

"Is there a barrier?"

"No"—Trian had turned to gaze back into the screen—"a barrier I could detect. But there is nothing at all. There is no sentient activity on board that vessel."

Trian's word had to be taken, of course, and Roymer was disappointed. A spaceship empty of life—Roymer shrugged. A derelict, then. But why the decreasing speed? Pre-set controls would account for that, of course, but why? Certainly, if one abandoned a ship, one would not arrange for it to—

He was interrupted by Trian's thought:

"Excuse me, but there is nothing. May I return to my quarters?"

Roymer nodded and thanked him, and Trian went ponderously away. Goladan said:

"Shall we prepare to board it, sir?"

"Yes."

And then Goladan was gone to give his proud orders.

Roymer continued to stare at the primitive vessel which hung on the plate. Curious. It was very interesting, always, to come upon derelict ships. The stories that were old, the silent tombs that had been drifting perhaps, for millions of years in the deep sea of space. In the beginning Roymer had hoped that the ship would be manned, and alien, but—nowadays, contact with an isolated race was rare, extremely rare. It was not to be hoped for, and he would be content with this, this undoubtedly empty, ancient ship.

And then, to Roymer's complete surprise, the ship at which he was staring shifted abruptly, turned on its axis, and flashed off like a live thing upon a new course.

When the defrosters activated and woke him up, Jansen lay for a while upon the steel table, blinking. As always with the

freeze, it was difficult to tell at first whether anything had actually happened. It was like a quick blink and no more, and then you were lying, feeling exactly the same, thinking the same thoughts even, and if there was anything at all different it was maybe that you were a little numb. And yet in the blink time took a great leap, and the months went by like—Jansen smiled—like fenceposts.

He raised a languid eye to the red bulb in the ceiling. Out. He sighed. The freeze had come and gone. He felt vaguely cheated, reflected that this time, before the freeze, he would take a little nap.

He climbed down from the table, noted that Cohn had already gone to the control room. He adjusted himself to the thought that they were approaching a new sun, and it came back to him suddenly that this would be the last one, now they would go home.

Well then, let this one have planets. To have come all this way, to have been gone from home for eleven years, and yet to find nothing—

He was jerked out of the old feeling of despair by a lurch of the ship. That would be Cohn taking her off the auto. And now, he thought, we will go in and run out the telescope and have a look, and there won't be a thing.

Wearily, he clumped off over the iron deck, going up to the control room. He had no hope left now, and he had been so hopeful at the beginning. As they are all hopeful, he thought, as they have been hoping now for three hundred years. And they will go on hoping, for a little while, and then men will become hard to get, even with the freeze, and then the starships won't go out any more. And Man will be doomed to the System for the rest of his days.

Therefore, he asked humbly, silently, let this one have planets.

Up in the dome of the control cabin, Cohn was bent over the panel, pouring power into the board. He looked up, nodded briefly as Jansen came in. It seemed to both of them that they had been apart for five minutes.

"Are they all hot yet?" asked Jansen.

"No, not yet."

The ship had been in deep space with her ports thrown open. Absolute cold had come in and gone to the core of her, and it was always a while before the ship was reclaimed and her instruments warmed. Even now there was a sharp chill in the air of the cabin.

Jansen sat down idly, rubbing his arms. "Last time around, I guess."

"Yes," said Cohn, and added laconically, "I wish Weizsäcker was here."

Jansen grinned. Weizsäcker, poor old Weizsäcker. He was long dead and it was a good thing, for he was the most maligned human being in the System.

For a hundred years his theory on the birth of planets, that every sun necessarily gave birth to a satellite family, had been an accepted part of the knowledge of Man. And then, of course, there had come space flight.

Jansen chuckled wryly. Lucky man, Weizsäcker. Now, two hundred years and a thousand stars later, there had been discovered just four planets. Alpha Centauri had one: a barren, ice-crusted mote no larger than the Moon; and Pollux had three, all dead lumps of cold rock and iron. None of the other stars had any at all. Yes, it would have been a great blow to Weizsäcker.

A hum of current broke into Jansen's thought as the telescope was run out. There was a sudden beginning of light upon the screen.

In spite of himself and the wry, hopeless feeling that had been in him, Jansen arose quickly, with a thin trickle of nervousness in his arms. There is always a chance, he thought, after all, there is always a chance. We have only been to a thousand suns, and in the Galaxy a thousand suns are not anything at all. So there is always a chance.

Cohn, calm and methodical, was manning the radar.

Gradually, condensing upon the center of the screen, the image of the star took shape. It hung at last, huge and yellow and flaming with an awful brilliance, and the prominences of the rim made the vast circle uneven. Because the ship was close and the filter was in, the stars of the background were invisible, and there was nothing but the one great sun.

Jansen began to adjust for observation.

The observation was brief.

They paused for a moment before beginning the tests, gazing upon the face of the alien sun. The first of their race to be here and to see, they were caught up for a time in the ancient, deep thrill of space and the unknown Universe.

They watched, and into the field of their vision, breaking in slowly upon the glaring edge of the sun's disk, there came a small black ball. It moved steadily away from the

edge, in toward the center of the sun. It was unquestionably a planet\*in transit.

When the alien ship moved, Roymer was considerably rattled.

One does not question Mind-Search, he knew, and so there could not be any living thing aboard that ship. Therefore, the ship's movement could be regarded only as a peculiar aberration in the still-functioning drive. Certainly, he thought, and peace returned to his mind.

But it did pose an uncomfortable problem. Boarding that ship would be no easy matter, not if the thing was inclined to go hopping away like that, with no warning. There were two hundred years of conditioning in Roymer, it would be impossible for him to put either his ship or his crew into an unnecessarily dangerous position. And wavery, erratic spaceships could undoubtedly be classified as dangerous.

Therefore, the ship would have to be disabled.

Regretfully, he connected with Fire Control, put the operation into the hands of the Firecon officer, and settled back to observe the results of the actions against the strange craft.

And the alien moved again.

Not suddenly, as before, but deliberately now, the thing turned once more from its course, and its speed decreased even more rapidly. It was still moving in upon Mina, but now its orbit was tangential and no longer direct. As Roymer watched the ship come about, he turned up the magnification for a larger view, checked the automatic readings on the board below the screen. And his eyes were suddenly directed to a small, conical projection which had begun to rise up out of the ship, which rose for a short distance and stopped, pointed in on the orbit towards Mina at the center.

Roymer was bewildered, but he acted immediately. Firecon was halted, all protective screens were re-established, and the patrol ship back-tracked quickly into the protection of deep space.

There was no question in Roymer's mind that the movements of the alien had been directed by a living intelligence, and not by any mechanical means. There was also no doubt in Roymer's mind that there was no living being on board that ship. The problem was acute.

Roymer felt the scalp of his hairless head beginning to crawl. In the history of the galaxy, there had been discovered but five



nonhuman races, yet never a race which did not betray its existence by the telepathic nature of its thinking. Roymer could not conceive of a people so alien that even the fundamental structure of their thought process was entirely different from the Galactics.

Extra-Galactics? He observed the ship closely and shook his head. No. Not an extra-Galactic ship—certainly, much too primitive a type.

Extraspacial? His scalp crawled again.

Completely at a loss as to what to do, Roymer again contacted Mind-Search and requested that Trian be sent to him immediately.

Trian was preceded by a puzzled Goladan. The orders to alien contact, then to Firecon, and finally for a quick retreat, had affected the lieutenant deeply. He was a man accustomed to a strictly logical and somewhat ponderous course of events. He waited expectantly for some explanation to come from his usually serene commander.

Roymer, however, was busily occupied in tracking the alien's new course. An orbit about Mina, Roymer observed, with that conical projection laid on the star; a device of war; or some measuring instrument?

The stolid Trian appeared—walking would not quite describe how—and was requested to make another attempt at contact with the alien. He replied with his usual eerie silence and in a moment, when he turned back to Roymer, there was surprise in the transmitted thought.

"I cannot understand. There is life there now."

Roymer was relieved, but Goladan was blinking.

Trian went on, turning again to gaze at the screen.—

"It is very remarkable. There are two life-beings. Human-type race. Their presence is very clear, they are"—he paused briefly—"explorers, it appears. But they were not there before. It is extremely unnerving."

So it is, Roymer agreed. He asked quickly: "Are they aware of us?"

"No. They are directing their attention on the star. Shall I contact?"

"No. Not yet. We will observe them first."

The alien ship floated upon the screen before them, moving in slow orbit about the star Mina.

Seven. There were seven of them. Seven planets, and three at least had atmospheres,

and two might even be inhabitable. Jansen was so excited he was hopping around the control room. Cohn did nothing but grin widely with a wondrous joy, and the two of them repeatedly shook hands and gloated.

"Seven!" roared Jansen. "Old lucky seven!"

Quickly then, and with extreme nervousness, they ran spectrograph analyses of each of those seven fascinating worlds. They began with the central planets, in the favorable temperature belt where life conditions would be most likely to exist, and they worked outwards.

For reasons which were as much sentimental as they were practical, they started with the third planet of this fruitful sun. There was a thin atmosphere, fainter even than that of Mars, and no oxygen. Silently they went on to the fourth. It was cold and heavy, perhaps twice as large as Earth, had a thick envelope of noxious gases. They saw with growing fear that there was no hope there, and they turned quickly inwards toward the warmer area nearer the sun.

On the second planet—as Jansen put it—they hit the jackpot.

A warm, green world it was, of an Earthlike size and atmosphere; oxygen and water vapor lines showed strong and clear in the analysis.

"This looks like it," said Jansen, grinning again.

Cohn nodded, left the screen and went over to man the navigating instruments.

"Let's go down and take a look."

"Radio check first." It was the proper procedure. Jansen had gone over it in his mind a thousand times. He clicked on the receiver, waited for the tubes to function, and then scanned for contact. As they moved in toward the new planet he listened intently, trying all lengths, waiting for any sound at all. There was nothing but the rasping static of open space.

"Well," he said finally, as the green planet grew large upon the screen, "if there's any race there, it doesn't have radio."

Cohn showed his relief.

"Could be a young civilization."

"Or one so ancient and advanced that it doesn't need radio."

Jansen refused to let his deep joy be dampened. It was impossible to know what would be there. Now it was just as it had been three hundred years ago, when the first Earth ship was approaching Mars. And it will be like this—Jansen thought—in every other system to which we go. How



"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and to-day I have won £232 10s. Please send two more."  
B. C., Tredegar, S. Wales.

—Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book," 1931

# JOAN THE WAD

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## AS HEALER

One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the lucky Well?"

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A young girl wrote and informed me that she had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has Joan the Wad.

## AS SPECULATOR

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/9. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

## AS LUCK BRINGER

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan.'"

## AS PRIZEWINNER

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that—, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it to him. When he won his £2,000, he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan.'"

**JOAN THE WAD'S achievements are unique. Never before was such a record placed before the Public. Ask yourself if you have ever heard of anything so stupendous. You have not. Results are what count, and these few Extracts from actual letters are typical of the many hundreds that are received, and from which we shall publish selections from time to time. We unreservedly GUARANTEE that these letters were absolutely spontaneous, and the originals are open to inspection at JOAN'S COTTAGE. Send at once for full information about this PROVED Luck Bringer. You, too, may benefit in Health, Wealth and Happiness to an amazing extent.**

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No. 175.—"Dear Joan the Wad, I received this week cheque for £71 8s. 7d. My share of the £1,000 Prize of the 'Sunday Graphic' Picture Puzzle. I have been near winning before, but you have brought me just the extra luck I wanted."—F. T., Salisbury.  
WON £153 17s., THEN £46 10s. 3d.

No. 191.—"Genuine account of Luck... since receiving Joan the Wad... I was successful in winning £153 17s. in the 'People' Xword No. 178 and also the 'News of the World' Xword No. 280, £46 10s. 3d., also £1 on a football coupon, which is amazing in itself, as all the luck came in one week."—A. B., Leamington Spa.

## WINNERS OF £8 11s. 1d.

No. 195.—"My father, myself and my sister had the pleasure of winning a Crossword Puzzle in the 'Sunday Pictorial', which came to £8 11s. 1d., which we put down to JOAN THE WAD, and we thank her very much."—L. B., Exning.

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## "DAILY HERALD" PICTURE CONTEST.

No. 216.—"Since having received JOAN THE WAD I received cheque, part share in the 'Daily Herald' Picture Contest £3 1s."—M. E., Notting Hill.

## £30,000 WINNER.

No. 222.—"Mrs. A. . . . of Lewisham, has just won £30,000 and says she has a JOAN THE WAD, so please send one to me."—Mrs. V., Bromley.

## FIRST PRIZE "NUGGETS."

No. 238.—"I have had some good luck since receiving JOAN THE WAD. I have won First Prize in 'ANSWERS' 'Nuggets.' I had JOAN THE WAD in February, and I have been lucky ever since."—Mrs. N. W., Wolverhampton.

## WON "DAILY MIRROR" HAMPER.

No. 245.—"I have just had my first win since having JOAN THE WAD, which was a 'DAILY MIRROR' HAMPER."—E. M. F., Brentwood.

## WON "NUGGETS" £300.

No. 257.—"My Husband is a keen Competitor in 'Bullets' and 'Nuggets.' He had not any luck until I gave him JOAN THE WAD, when the first week he secured a credit note in 'Nuggets' and last week FIRST Prize in 'Nuggets' £300.—Mrs. A. B., Salford.

## CAN ANYONE BEAT THIS?

No. 286.—"Immediately after receiving my JOAN THE WAD I won a 3rd Prize in a local Derby Sweep, then I was given employment after seven months of idleness and finally had a correct forecast in Picture Puzzle 'Glasgow Sunday Mail', which entitles me to a share of the Prize Money." W. M., Glasgow, C.A.

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can you picture what there will be? There is nothing at all in your past to give you a clue. You can only hope.

The planet was a beautiful green ball on the screen.

The thought which came out of Trian's mind was tinged with relief.

"I see how it was done. They have achieved a complete stasis, a perfect state of suspended animation which they produce by an ingenious usage of the absolute zero of outer space. Thus, when they are—frozen, is the way they regard it—their minds do not function, and their lives are not detectable. They have just recently revived and are directing their ship."

Roymer digested the new information slowly. What kind of a race was this? A race which flew in primitive star ships, yet it had already conquered one of the greatest problems in Galactic history, a problem which had baffled the Galactics for millions of years. Roymer was uneasy.

"A very ingenious device," Trian was thinking, "they use it to alter the amount of subjective time consumed in their explorations. Their star ship has a very low maximum speed. Hence, without this—freeze—their voyage would take up a good portion of their lives."

"Can you classify the mind-type?" Roymer asked with growing concern.

Trian reflected silently for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "although the type is extremely unusual. I have never observed it before. General classification would be Human-Four. More specifically, I would place them at the Ninth level."

Roymer started. "The Ninth level?"

"Yes. As I say, they are extremely unusual."

Roymer was now clearly worried. He turned away and paced the deck for several moments. Abruptly, he left the room and went to the files of alien classification. He was gone for a long time, while Goladan fidgeted and Trian continued to gather information plucked across space from the alien minds. Roymer came back at last.

"What are they doing?"

"They are moving in on the second planet. They are about to determine whether the conditions are suitable there for an establishment of a colony of their kind."

Gravely, Roymer gave his orders to navigation. The patrol ship swung into motion, sped off swiftly in the direction of the second planet.

There was a single, huge blue ocean which covered an entire hemisphere of the new world. And the rest of the surface was a young jungle, wet and green and empty of any kind of people, choked with queer growths of green and orange. They circled the globe at a height of several thousand feet, and to their amazement and joy, they never saw a living thing; not a bird or a rabbit or the alien equivalent, in fact nothing alive at all. And so they stared in happy fascination.

"This is it," Jansen said again, his voice uneven.

"What do you think we ought to call it?" Cohn was speaking absently. "New Earth? Utopia?"

Together they watched the broken terrain slide by beneath them.

"No people at all. It's ours." And after a while Jansen said: "New Earth. That's a good name."

Cohn was observing the features of the ground intently.

"Do you notice the kind of . . . circular appearance of most of those mountain ranges? Like on the Moon, but grown over and eroded. They're all almost perfect circles"

Pulling his mind away from the tremendous visions he had of the colony which would be here, Jansen tried to look at the mountains with an objective eye. Yes, he realized with faint surprise, they were round, like Moon craters.

"Peculiar," Cohn muttered. "Not natural, I don't think. Couldn't be. Meteors not likely in this atmosphere. What in—?"

Jansen jumped. "Look there," he cried suddenly, "a round lake!"

Off toward the northern pole of the planet, a lake which was a perfect circle came slowly into view. There was no break in the rim other than that of a small stream which flowed in from the north.

"That's not natural," Cohn said briefly, "someone built that."

They were moving on to the dark side now, and Cohn turned the ship around. The sense of exhilaration was too new for them to be let down, but the strange sight of a huge number of perfect circles, existing haphazardly like the remains of great splashes on the surface of the planet, was unnerving.

It was the sight of one particular crater, a great barren hole in the midst of a wide red desert, which rang a bell in Jansen's memory, and he blurted:

"A war! There was a war here. That

one there looks just like a fusion bomb crater."

Cohn stared, then raised his eyebrows.

"I'll bet you're right."

"A bomb crater, do you see? Pushes up hills on all sides in a circle, and kills—" A sudden, terrible thought hit Jansen. Radioactivity. Would there be radioactivity here?

While Cohn brought the ship in low over the desert, he tried to calm Jansen's fears.

"There couldn't be much. Too much plant life. Jungles all over the place. Take it easy, man."

"But there's not a living thing on the planet. I'll bet that's why there was a war. It got out of hand, the radioactivity got everything. We might have done this to Earth!"

They glided in over the flat emptiness of the desert, and the counters began to click madly.

"That's it," Jansen said conclusively, "still radioactive. It might not have been too long ago."

"Could have been a million years, for all we know."

"Well, most places are safe, apparently. We'll check before we go down."

As he pulled the ship up and away, Cohn whistled.

"Do you suppose there's really not a living thing? I mean, not a bug or a germ or even a virus? Why, it's like a clean new world, a nursery!" He could not take his eyes from the screen.

They were going down now. In a very little while they would be out and walking in the sun. The lust of the feeling was indescribable. They were Earthmen freed forever from the choked home of the System, Earthmen gone out to the stars, landing now upon the next world of their empire.

Cohn could not control himself.

"Do we need a flag?" he said grinning. "How do we claim this place?"

"Just set her down, man," Jansen roared.

Cohn began to chuckle.

"Oh, brave new world," he laughed, "that has no people in it."

"But why do we have to contact them?" Goladan asked impatiently. "Could we not just—"

Roymer interrupted without looking at him.

"The law requires that contact be made and the situation explained before action

is taken. Otherwise it would be a barbarous act."

Goladan brooded.

The patrol ship hung in the shadow of the dark side, tracing the alien by its radioactive trail. The alien was going down for a landing on the daylight side.

Trián came forward with the other members of the Alien Contact Crew, reported to Roymer. "The aliens have landed."

"Yes," said Roymer, "we will let them have a little time. Trián, do you think you will have any difficulty in the transmission?"

"No. Conversation will not be difficult. Although the confused and complex nature of their thought-patterns does make their inner reactions somewhat obscure. But I do not think there will be any problem."

"Very well. You will remain here and relay the messages."

"Yes."

The patrol ship flashed quickly up over the north pole, then swung inward toward the equator, circling the spot where the alien had gone down. Roymer brought his ship in low and with the silence characteristic of a Galactic, landed her in a wooded spot a mile east of the alien. The Galactics remained in their ship for a short while as Trián continued his probe for information. When at last the Alien Contact Crew stepped out, Roymer and Goladan were in the lead. The rest of the crew faded quietly into the jungle.

As he walked through the young orange brush, Roymer regarded the world around him. Almost ready for repopulation, he thought, in another hundred years the radiation will all be gone, and we will come back. One by one the worlds of that war will be reclaimed.

He felt Trián's directions pop into his mind.

*An anthology of fantasy tales*

# From Unknown Worlds

*fully illustrated*

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"You are approaching them. Proceed with caution. They are just beyond the next small rise. I think you had better wait, since they are remaining close to their ship."

Roymer sent back a silent yes, Motioning Goladan to be quiet, Roymer led the way up the last rise. In the jungle around him the Galactic crew moved silently.

The air was perfect; there was no radiation. Except for the wild orange color of the vegetation, the spot was a Garden of Eden. Jansen felt instinctively that there was no danger here, no terrible blight or virus or any harmful thing. He felt a violent urge to get out of his spacesuit and

run and breathe, but it was forbidden. Not on the first trip. That would come later, after all the tests and experiments had been made and the world pronounced safe.

One of the first things Jansen did was get out the recorder and solemnly claim this world for the Solar Federation, recording the historic words for the archives of Earth. And he and Cohn remained for a while by the air lock of their ship, gazing around at the strange yet familiar world into which they had come.

"Later on we'll search for ruins," Cohn said. "Keep an eye out for anything that moves. It's possible that there are some of them left and who knows what they'll

look like. Mutants, probably, with five heads. So keep an eye open."

"Right."

Jansen began collecting samples of the ground, of the air, of the nearer foliage. The dirt was Earth-dirt, there was no difference. He reached down and crumbled the soft moist sod with his fingers. The flowers may be a little peculiar—probably mutated, he thought—but the dirt is honest to goodness dirt, and I'll bet the air is Earth-air.

He rose and stared into the clear open blue of the sky, feeling again an almost overpowering urge to throw open his helmet and breathe, and as he stared at the sky and at the green and orange hills, suddenly, a short distance from where he stood, a little old man came walking over the hill.

They stood facing each other across the silent space of a foreign glade. Roymer's face was old and smiling; Jansen looked back at him with absolute astonishment.

After a short pause, Roymer began to walk out onto the open soil, with Goladan following, and Jansen went for his heat gun.

"Cohn!" he yelled, in a raw brittle voice, "Cohn!"

And as Cohn turned and saw and froze, Jansen heard words being spoken in his brain. They were words coming from the little old man.

"Please do not shoot," the old man said, his lips unmoving.

"No, don't shoot," Cohn said quickly. "Wait. Let him alone." The hand of Cohn, too, was at his heat gun.

Roymer smiled. To the two Earth-men his face was incredibly old and wise and gentle. He was thinking: Had I been a nonhuman they would have killed me.

He sent a thought back to Trian. The Mind-Searcher picked it up and relayed it into the brains of the Earthmen, sending it through their cortical centers and then up into their conscious minds, so that the words were heard in the language of Earth. "Thank you." Roymer said gently. Jansen's hand held the heat gun leveled on Roymer's chest. He stared, not knowing what to say.

"Please remain where you are," Cohn's voice was hard and steady.

Roymer halted obligingly. Goladan stopped at his elbow, peering at the Earthmen with mingled fear and curiosity. The sight of fear helped Jansen very much.

"Who are you?" Cohn said clearly, separating the words.

Roymer folded his hands comfortably across his chest, he was still smiling.

"With your leave, I will explain our presence."

Cohn just stared.

"There will be a great deal to explain. May we sit down and talk?"

Trian helped with the suggestion. They sat down.

The sun of the new world was setting, and the conference went on. Roymer was doing most of the talking. The Earthmen sat transfixed.

It was like growing up suddenly, in the space of a second.

The history of Earth and of all Mankind just faded and dropped away. They heard of great races and worlds beyond number, the illimitable government which was the Galactic Federation. The fiction, the legends, the dreams of a thousand years had come true in a moment, in the figure of a square little old man who was not from Earth. There was a great deal for them to learn and accept in the time of a single afternoon, on an alien planet.

But it was just as new and real to them that they had discovered an uninhabited, fertile planet, the first to be found by Man. And they could not help but revolt from the sudden realization that the planet might well be someone else's property—that the Galactics owned everything worth owning.

It was an intolerable thought.

"How far," asked Cohn, as his heart pushed up in his throat, "does the Galactic League extend?"

Roymer's voice was calm and direct in their minds.

"Only throughout the central regions of the galaxy. There are millions of stars along the rim which have not yet been explored."

Cohn relaxed, bowed down with relief. There was room then, for Earthmen.

"This planet. Is it part of the Federation?"

"Yes," said Roymer, and Cohn tried to mask his thought. Cohn was angry, and he hoped that the alien could not read his mind as well as he could talk to it. To have come this far—

"There was a race here once," Roymer was saying, "a humanoid race which was almost totally destroyed by war. This planet has been uninhabitable for a very long time. A few of its people who were in space at the time of the last attack were spared. The Federation established them elsewhere. When the planet is ready, the



descendants of those survivors will be brought back. It is their home."

Neither of the Earthmen spoke.

"It is surprising," Roymer went on, "that your home world is in the desert. We had thought that there were no habitable worlds—"

"The desert?"

"Yes. The region of the galaxy from which you have come is that which we call the desert. It is an area almost entirely devoid of planets. Would you mind telling me which star is your home?"

Cohn stiffened.

"I'm afraid our government would not permit us to disclose any information concerning our race."

"As you wish. I am sorry you are disturbed. I was curious to know—" He waved a negligent hand to show that the information was unimportant. We will get it later, he thought, when we decipher their charts. He was coming to the end of the conference, he was about to say what he had come to say.

"No doubt you have been exploring the stars about your world?"

The Earthmen both nodded. But for the question concerning Sol, they long ago would have lost all fear of this placid old man and his wide-eyed, silent companion.

"Perhaps you would like to know," said Roymer, "why your area is a desert."

Instantly, both Jansen and Cohn were completely absorbed. This was it, the end of three hundred years of searching. They would go home with the answer.

Roymer never relaxed.

"Not too long ago," he said, "approximately thirty thousand years by your reckoning, a great race ruled the desert, a race which was known as the Antha, and it was not a desert then. The Antha ruled hundreds of worlds. They were perhaps the greatest of all the Galactic peoples; certainly they were as brilliant a race as the galaxy has ever known.

"But they were not a good race. For hundreds of years, while they were still young, we tried to bring them into the Federation. They refused, and of course we did not force them. But as the years went by the scope of their knowledge increased amazingly; shortly they were the technological equals of any other race in the galaxy. And then the Antha embarked upon an era of imperialistic expansion.

"They were superior, they knew it and were proud. And so they pushed out and enveloped the races and worlds of the area

now known as the desert. Their rule was a tyranny unequaled in Galactic history."

The Earthmen never moved, and Roymer went on.

"But the Antha were not members of the Federation, and, therefore, they were not answerable for their acts. We could only stand by and watch as they spread their vicious rule from world to world. They were absolutely ruthless.

"As an example of their kind of rule, I will tell you of their crime against the Apectans.

"The planet of Apectus not only resisted the Antha, but somehow managed to hold out against their approach for several years. The Antha finally conquered and then, in retaliation for the Apectans' valor, they conducted the most brutal of their mass experiments.

"They were a brilliant people. They had been experimenting with the genes of heredity. Somehow they found a way to alter the genes of the Apectans, who were humanoids like themselves, and they did it on a mass scale. They did not choose to exterminate the race, their revenge was much greater. Every Apectan born since the Antha invasion, has been born without one arm."

Jansen sucked in his breath. It was a very horrible thing to hear, and a sudden memory came into his brain. Caesar did that, he thought. He cut off the right hands of the Gauls. Peculiar coincidence. Jansen felt uneasy.

Roymer paused for a moment.

The news of what happened to the Apectans set the Galactic peoples up in arms, but it was not until the Antha attacked a Federation world that we finally moved against them. It was the greatest war in the history of Life.

"You will perhaps understand how great a people the Antha were when I tell you that they alone, unaided, dependent entirely upon their own resources, fought the rest of the Galactics, and fought them to a standstill. As the terrible years went by we lost whole races and planets—like this one, which was one the Antha destroyed—and yet we could not defeat them.

"It was only after many years, when a Galactic invented the most dangerous weapon of all, that we won. The invention—of which only the Galactic Council has knowledge—enabled us to turn the suns of the Antha into novae, at long range. One by one we destroyed the Antha worlds.

We hunted them through all the planets of the desert; for the first time in history the edict of the Federation was death, death for an entire race. At last there were no longer any habitable worlds where the Antha had been. We burned their worlds, and ran them down in space. Thirty thousand years ago, the civilization of the Antha perished."

Roymer had finished. He looked at the Earthmen out of grave, tired old eyes.

Cohn was staring in open-mouth fascination, but Jansen—unaccountably felt a chill. The story of Caesar remained uncomfortably in his mind. And he had a quick, awful suspicion.

"Are you sure you got all of them?"

"No. Some surely must have escaped. There were too many in space, and space is without limits."

Jansen wanted to know: "Have any of them been heard of since?"

Roymer's smile left him as the truth came out. "No. Not until now."

There were only a few more seconds. He gave them time to understand. He could not help telling them that he was sorry, he even apologized. And then he sent the order with his mind.

The Antha died quickly and silently, without pain.

Only thirty thousand years, Roymer was thinking, but thirty thousand years, and they came back out to the stars. They have no memory now of what they were or what they have done. They started all over again, the old history of the race has been lost, and in thirty thousand years they came all the way back.

Roymer shook his head with sad wonder and awe. The most brilliant people of all.

Goladan came in quietly with the final reports.

"There are no charts," he grumbled, "no maps at all. We will not be able to trace them to their home star."

Roymer did not know, really, what was right, to be disappointed or relieved. We cannot destroy them now, he thought, not right away. He could not help being relieved. Maybe this time there will be a way, and they will not have to be destroyed. They could be—

He remembered the edict—the edict of death. The Antha had forged it for themselves and it was just. He realized that there wasn't much hope.

The reports were on his desk and he

regarded them with a wry smile. There was indeed no way to trace them back. They had no charts, only a regular series of course-check co-ordinates which were pre-set on their home planet and which were not decipherable. Even at this stage of their civilization they had already anticipated the consequences of having their ship fall into alien hands. And this although they lived in the desert.

Goladan startled him with an anxious question:

"What can we do?"

Roymer was silent.

We can wait, he thought. Gradually, one by one, they will come out of the desert, and when they come we will be waiting. Perhaps one day we will follow one back and destroy their world, and perhaps before then we will find a way to save them.

Suddenly, as his eyes wandered over the report before him and he recalled the ingenious mechanism of the freeze, a chilling, unbidden thought came into his brain.

And perhaps, he thought calmly, for he was a philosophical man, they will come out already equipped to rule the galaxy.

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# STARDUST

By CHAD OLIVER

*In space, people can get lost for a looooong time! Then, mere physical rescue is not enough; there's little point rescuing a man's body, if you kill his mind doing it!*

COLLINS floated through the jet blackness with every sense alert. He heard the low hum of voices welling up out of the emptiness ahead of him and the oxygen in the still air tasted sweet to him as he drank it into his lungs. The cold smell of metal was all around him, hemming him in, and he shivered involuntarily in the darkness.

At precisely the right instant, he extended his hand forward, made contact with an invisible brace that felt rough and dead to his tingling fingers, and changed direction with a light delicate shove. The new tunnel was almost as dark as the one he had left behind him, but he could see a faint luminous haze in the distance. His pulses quickened as tiny warmth currents touched his skin and he caught the smell of men in the abyss ahead of him.

It was good to be going toward men, Collins thought. It was a good feeling. He kept to the exact center of the shaft, as far away from the cold metal taste as he could get. A man knew loneliness in the eternal night, alone with his thoughts. A man knew fear—

He guided his body around another turn, and still another, and felt the sudden life shocks in front of him. He closed his eyes to narrow slits, letting them adjust. He could feel space and air on all sides, and the cold, unpleasant smell of metal receded into the distance. Warmth currents bathed his skin—and yet there was a coolness even here, an icy coolness of hostility that mottled the warmth tides like a cancerous disease—

Collins shook the feeling from his mind. Slowly, gradually, the chamber took shape around him, although he still could not look directly at the intolerable, flickering flame that hissed and sputtered atop the fire torch. Black shadows writhed in the gray half-light on the periphery of the fire-glow and white bodies floated all around him, waiting.

Collins took a deep breath. He could see again.

"Class will come to order," he said into the silence.

The men—young men, all of them—hesitated and then moved into a circle around him. The circle was composed of three distinct layers, one even with Collins, one slightly above him, and another just below him. Each layer contained four men. Collins forced himself to look directly at the fire torch, even though the unaccustomed brightness lanced little needles of pain through his eyes and narrowed their pupils to tiny dots of black. It was not easy, but he kept his face expressionless.

Men were made to live in light.

"Before we start, do any of you have any questions about your work for today?" His voice was soft, patient. But it had a firm edge to it—sheathed now, but capable of cutting like a knife when the need arose.

The young men looked at each other, faintly hostile, uncertain.

"Speak up," Collins said, smiling. "Asking questions is not a sign of ignorance, you know. It is only the stupid who never ask questions."

One of the men cleared his throat. It was Lanson, one of the most intelligent of them. Collins nodded encouragement.

"We don't understand our problem for today, sir," he said, faintly accenting the *sir* to give it a slightly contemptuous ring. "We've talked it over among ourselves, but we can't seem to get it."

"Be specific, Lanson. Exactly what is it that you do not understand?"

Lanson shifted nervously in the still air. "It's about this problem of falling bodies, sir," he said. His voice was genuinely puzzled now; Lanson was interested almost in spite of himself. "You stated that, because of gravity, two bodies will fall through a vacuum at precisely the same rate of speed, regardless of weight—that is, if we get your meaning correctly, a heavy body will fall with the same speed as a light body, or, to use your example, a piece of paper and a chunk of metal will hit the floor together."

"O.K. so far, Lanson," Collins braced himself, knowing what was coming. It was difficult.

"Well, sir," Lanson continued, choosing his words with care, "we sort of see what you're driving at in the concepts *heavy* and *light*—but what is *falling*? What pushes the piece of paper and the chunk of metal down? Why don't they float like we do?"

"They *do* float," a voice whispered loudly. "Everyone knows that."

Collins looked at the white bodies around him, pale and ghostly in the dancing fire-glow. Beyond them, the great darkness hovered like a gigantic beast, shadow tentacles writhing, waiting to envelop them, to pull them all into the black vault of the abyss. Collins shivered again as an icy chill crawled down his spine. They couldn't go on like this forever, he knew. They weren't trying the way they used to—it was very hard, and they weren't *trying*. Every day, every hour, they lost ground. And below them, dancing around their great fires—

He *had* to make them see.

"You are right, in a sense," he told them carefully. "I'm glad to see that you're using your minds, and not just accepting what I say without thought of your own. They *do* float, as you've seen—here. The point is that conditions here are unnatural, not normal, although they are the only ones we've ever known. I've tried to tell you about gravity—"

"Him and his gravity," someone snickered.

"We're not approaching the situation with the proper gravity," someone else whispered. Several of the young men laughed aloud at the pun, staring at Collins with ill-concealed contempt.

"Yes, but what *is* gravity?" Lanson persisted. "You say that in science we experiment, we measure, we deal with facts rather than wishful thinking. Very well—*show* us some gravity then."

Collins breathed deeply, feeling the doubt all around him. "I can show you no gravity that you can recognize as such," he said slowly. "Nor can I show you the atoms of which matter is composed, much less the subatomic constituents of the atoms themselves. You must be patient, you must consider the situation in which we find ourselves. Even in science, gentlemen, there are times when we must go along on faith, do the best we can—"

"We're not trying to dispute your word,

sir," said Lanson, who was doing precisely that. "But it seems to us that even if all this stuff were true somewhere, sometime, we still have to live *here* and not *there*. Since we have to live here, why not confine ourselves to this world, to what can be of practical use to us, and just forget about—"

"No!" Collins said sharply, the anger rising in him like a hot flood. "That will do, Lanson, unless you wish to be reported. We *must* not forget, or we are lost, we are animals, we are no longer men. One day you will see and understand. Until then—"

He stopped, suddenly. The men shifted uncertainly in the air. Collins tensed, every sense alive, vibrant, questing. He probed the deep shadows. His skin tingled. Something was out there—those shadows were no longer empty. Something—

"The other men," he hissed. "Kill that torch."

The flame sputtered and died. The men drifted backward, united now against a common danger, fighting to adjust their eyes again to the absence of light. Collins felt his heart hammering in his throat and cold sweat in the palms of his hands. He drew his knife, waiting.

In the dead silence, panic stalked on padded feet through the chamber of darkness.

Ship's Officer Mark Langston tossed off a few choice expletives and permitted them to explode harmlessly within the confines of his book-lined office. He flipped open a desk drawer, removed a well-worn flask, and treated himself to a short snifter of Scotch. Then he replaced the flask, banished the contemptuous expression from his face, and glued a patient smile to his mouth.

"Come in," he said, bracing himself.

The office door opened with a calm precision that hinted at a hurricane just below the horizon. A tall, angular, hatchet-faced woman marched inexorably into the room with her teen-age daughter following meekly in her wake.

"You are the Ship's Officer?" inquired the woman in a voice like a file sawing on iron.

"Right the first time," said Mark Langston.

"You're not the same man I spoke to last time," the woman stated suspiciously. "Where is Mr. Raleigh?"

"He jumped overboard," Mark Langston wanted to say.

"Mr. Raleigh is not on duty at the

moment," Mark Langston said. "My name is Langston—may I be of service?"

"Well, I should certainly hope so. I am Mrs. Simmons, and this is my daughter Laura."

Mark Langston nodded and glanced at the note that Raleigh had left on his desk. *As a small token of my esteem, I have willed you Mrs. Simmons, the note read. May God have mercy on your soul.*

"What seems to be the trouble, Mrs. Simmons?"

Mrs. Simmons sighed deeply, giving an excellent imitation of a death rattle. "It's this *excruciating* artificial gravity, Mr. Langston," she said. "I simply cannot stand it another moment. I'm having terrible pains around my heart and my back aches. I'm a nervous wreck. You've got to *do* something, my man. And my darling Laura absolutely can't sleep at night—she does need her sleep so, she's such a delicate child. Aren't you, Laura?"

"Yes, mother," said Laura in a delicate voice.

"Well now, Mrs. Simmons," Langston said carefully, struggling desperately to maintain the smile on his face, "I find this most difficult to understand. Do you have these symptoms back on Earth? You see, ship's gravity is kept at all times at Earth normal—there's no difference whatever, in effect, between artificial gravity and the gravity you have lived with all your life."

"My good man," Mrs. Simmons said, drawing herself up haughtily, "are you accusing me of—"

"Not at all, not at all," Langston lied. He forced himself to remember Mr. Simmons and his power and influence with the Interstellar Board of Trade. "It's quite possible that the machinery is out of adjustment or something. I'll check into it at once, Mrs. Simmons. We will spare no effort in securing your comfort during your stay on our ship. In the meantime, won't you check with Dr. Ford on Three Deck? I'm certain that he'll be able to help you and your daughter."

Mrs. Simmons brightened visibly. "Oh Mr. Langston!" she breathed "Do you *really* think I require medical attention?"

"It's entirely possible, Mrs. Simmons," Mark Langston said, and meant it. He neglected to mention what sort of medical attention he thought Mrs. Simmonds needed, but that was a minor detail. "I'll buzz Dr. Ford and he'll be ready to take care of you instantly."

"Thank you *so* much," Mrs. Simmons said happily. "Come, Laura—now watch your step, dear."

Mrs. Simmons and her offspring left the room and the door hissed shut behind them. Mark Langston maliciously neglected to warn Ford in advance; it was a dirty trick to play on the Doc, of course, but Ford was capable of handling the situation and would duly dispatch Mrs. Simmons and Laura to some other luckless official.

Langston got up from his desk and limped over to the private screen against the outside wall. He flicked it on and an infinity of night reached coldly into his soul and pulled him out among a myriad of incredible stars—

There it was, right in his office with him. Space, deep space, the endless darkness and the stars that had been his life, his very being. He lost himself in the ever-new immensities. This was space—the space that he had helped to conquer, the star trails that he had made his own. This was the strange world that he had chosen for a home. Out there, far beyond imagining, distant beyond belief, the men and the women that he had lived with, fought with, laughed with, flashed forever into the depths of night. They carried the great adventure onward, always, and now—

And now he was no longer with them.

Mark Langston turned off the screen and limped back to his desk. They had opened up the greatest frontier of them all—and for what? For Mrs. Simmons and Laura? For stupidity and greed and ignorance? For wealthy tourists who made the Earth a world to be ridiculed? For what?

Yes, he was still in space. He smiled without humor. He would have been wiser to have stayed on Earth, or on one of a hundred worlds that he had known. Wiser to have left space behind him. Once, on the long runs, the new runs, he had been proud and happy to be a man; he had gloried in it. Now—

But he could not leave space. It was a part of him.

A red light flashed over his visibox. He switched it on. It was Stan Owens, the ship anthropologist. He looked excited, which was profoundly unusual.

"What's up, Stan? More of those pesky space pirates?"

"Cut the clowning, Father Time. We've run smack dab into the middle of something."



"On the Capella run? What is it—the Ultimate Boredom at last?"

"On the level, Mark. We need you in the control room on the double."

Mark Langston eyed his friend's face with sudden interest. "Hey," he said, "you're not kidding!"

"Come up and see for yourself," Owens smiled, and switched off.

Mark Langston left his office at a thoroughly respectable speed, hurried down the corridor with scarcely a limp, and caught the lift to the control room. He stepped out and instantly it hit him—the spirit, the feel of a ship up against the unknown. He had known that feeling a thousand times in his life, and he responded to it with a spreading grin.

Owens collared him and pulled him toward a knot of men gathered around a subsidiary computer. "Hang on tight, old son," the anthropologist said. "This may be too much for your ancient nervous system—this crate has hit the well-known jackpot."

The men stepped back to make room and Captain Kleberg welcomed Mark by shoving a computer report into his hand. "Take a look at this, Mark," he said, running his fingers through his iron-gray hair. "I've about decided that the computer's psycho, or we're psycho, or both."

Langston examined the report with a practiced eye. It was a sub-space survey report—normal space being sub-space with respect to their ship, the *Wilson Langford*, in hyperspace—and seemed to be routine enough at first glance. There was the usual co-ordinate check, the drift check, the hydrogen check, the distress beam check—nothing to get excited about. In fact—

Then he saw it.

"But that's impossible," he said.

"Agreed," said Captain Kleberg. "But there it is."

"You figure it out," Owens suggested.

Mark Langston checked the report again carefully. "Is this a gag?" he asked, knowing full well that it wasn't. "There *can't* be a ship down there."

"Just the same," pointed out the Navigation Officer, "thar she blows!"

"Maybe it's the *Flying Dutchman*," Owens offered.

Langston tried to think the thing through logically. But it simply *wasn't* logical. There evidently was some sort of a ship down there, in normal space, light-years out from

any planetary system. What was it doing there? How did it get there?

"Any distress calls of any sort?" he asked.

"Dead silence," said Captain Kleberg. "And we can't get a *blip* out of her."

"How about positioning?"

"We're almost directly 'above' her," the Navigation Officer reported. "We're practically back-pedaling to keep from losing her."

"How about acceleration?"

"Hard to tell, but I'd guess that she's in free fall. Absolutely no energy tracings at all, and no radiation. She's dead."

Langston let that sink in for a minute. "Have you got a picture yet?" he asked finally.

"They're building one up downstairs," Captain Kleberg said. "It isn't an easy job, of course, but they should be getting something soon."

"Just wait until some of our noble human cargo gets wind of the fact that we're off our course and will miss scheduled landing time by a week or three," Stan Owens chuckled. "We'll have everybody down on us like a pack of hyenas."

"That isn't funny," said Captain Kleberg.

"We'll probably get strung up by our thumbs," Mark Langston said, "while the esteemed officials of the Interstellar Board of Trade dance around the tribal fires and massage our toes with jolly acid."

"That isn't funny either," the harassed captain pointed out.

"Have you met Mrs. Simmons?" asked Stan Owens fiendishly. "A very interesting cultural phenomenon—"

"You and your cultural phenomena," shot back Captain Kleberg. "You anthropologists think you're so—"

There was a whirring buzz and a three-dimensional mock-up thumped out of a chute. Captain Kleberg snatched it up and put it on a chart table where everyone could get a good look at it.

There was silence in the control room.

"It just can't be," Captain Kleberg said finally, his voice very small.

"No," Mark Langston agreed softly. "But it is."

The men stared at each other, searching for words that were not there.

They came up from the depths, spawned in hate, fed on fury. Collins could smell them, feel the warmth currents from their bodies and the rush and surge of air cur-

rents from beating wings. They choked the chamber, filling it, strangling it, shooting up like gas under pressure from the world below.

Like creatures from hell, and yet—

Collins edged back to the mouth of the tunnel and stopped, letting the rest of the rear guard slide into position around him. Differences were forgotten now, melted in the flame of danger. Collins smiled without humor. It was ironic—they respected him only as a fighter—

He floated down to the very floor of the chamber and touched the cold metal. He blanked his mind, watching his chance.

The other men came in high, as they always did, and he felt and smelled and heard the battle in the darkness above him. Knives and clubs and spears, collided with clanging crashes and the echoes of harsh breathing filled the chamber with sound. He strained his eyes, trying to see. Something wet and sticky brushed his face—blood pumping in a warm pulsing stream from a punctured artery.

With a blind rage seething within him, a rage as much at himself as his enemies, Collins launched himself from the floor. His nostrils quivered and he angrily choked off a low animal growl of defiance in his throat. He went up, high and hard, his knife extended in front of him. For a long, intolerable instant there was nothing. And then—contact.

Collins cut and slashed with methodical accuracy, giving no warning and no quarter. Like so many men who see fighting for what it is, he cherished no illusions about it and was chillingly effective. His invisible antagonist fought in silence and then stopped, suddenly. Collins moved on, pushing the body away from him. He went up again, slowly, trying to sort the sounds and smells and feelings of battle into some kind of a coherent pattern that would enable him to tell friend from foe. He hesitated, briefly, sensing danger, and then shifted just in time as something hissed past his head and struck his shoulder a numbing blow.

Fighting to see, Collins closed to the attack. The man almost got away from him, but he grabbed a foot and held on. The man suddenly lurched forward and up, and Collins felt the rush of air from his wings. Desperately, he lashed out with his knife. He had to get the mutant before he was smashed against a wall—those fragile wings gave the man an impossible advantage in the open air.

A foot kicked him over and over again, methodically, in the face. There was a complete absence of vocal sound, lending to the combat the unreal deadness of a dream. Collins twisted into position, ignoring the kicking foot, and slashed at a wing. The knife punched home, and Collins carefully ripped the thin membrane to shreds. His opponent faltered. Collins cut him again, and then was pushed away. Collins let him go and dived for the tunnel. He could feel the battle receding around him as the other men began to turn back. The smell of blood was sickening in the still air. His shoulder throbbed with pain and his throat was dry and thick with dust.

Collins darted into the tunnel, gasping for breath, and pushed himself forward. He hadn't gone ten yards before he contacted someone else—going the other way.

A knife whirled past his ear and he caught an arm and twisted. There was only a weak, hopeless resistance. Tired or wounded, or perhaps both, he thought grimly. He moved in for the kill, his own knife ready.

"You're beaten," he whispered. "Surrender."

By way of reply, a hand reached out of the darkness and fingernails clawed at his face. Collins closed in warily, seeking an opening. A cornered animal was always dangerous, he had read, and man was no exception. But he was sick of the killing, sick with horror and the smell of blood. His anger was gone, leaving the man. But he could see no way out. What could you do with such a man? When you gave him the chance for his life, he thanked you with renewed fury. His enemy was not a man, he caught himself thinking. He was an animal—

He raised the knife.

"My spirit will return to destroy you," the man hissed weakly. "My spirit will not forget!"

Suddenly revolted by the thing he had almost done, Collins returned the knife to its sheath.

"You are my prisoner," he said quietly.

The man laughed in his face and clawed him again, feebly. Collins hit him once, wincing as his fist smashed into his jaw, holding on to the other's arm to keep him from floating away. Then he pulled the inert body with him down the tunnel, away from the chamber of death and into the endless darkness and the silence.

After turning the man over to Malcolm,

and resting briefly in his quarters, Collins swam up through the dark tunnels to the captain's room. He tried the door, found it unlocked, and floated inside.

The captain's torch was burning as always. It was a wonderful thing, as all the special torches were with their combustion draft chambers, but more wonderful still was the soft, steady light from the myriad of stars that were suspended like gleaming jewels in the black velvet of the viewports. Collins drank in their beauty with his eyes and then turned toward the captain.

"Sit down, my boy," the captain said. "I was just having lunch."

The captain was eating alone at the little table in the center of the control room. His long, snow-white hair was silver in the flickering torchlight and his dark eyes flashed in his hard, deeply-lined face. The captain had strapped himself into his chair and fastened the plate and glass to the nailed-down table. It was far simpler to eat while floating, but the captain refused to do so.

Collins slid into the chair across from him and buckled himself in place. He ate in silence for a moment, swallowing the sticky synthetics without relish and washing them down with drafts of water sucked up through a straw from a closed glass.

"We've got to find a way," Collins said finally.

"Yes. We lost a man."

"There *must* be a way."

"There is no way," the captain said slowly. "But we must keep trying."

Collins looked at the captain, his mind tired with worry. The captain was very old now, he thought. Very old, this man who had held them all together for so long. When he was gone—

"They are beginning to slip, my boy," the captain said. "I don't know how much longer we can hold them. They are turning into animals like the rest of them. And when that happens, we are through. The fools! Do they believe that the food and water will last forever? Time, *time*—we must have more time, and it is running out on us."

Collins shrugged. "We're losing the fight as it is," he pointed out. "Let's not kid ourselves. We need more than time, and dreams won't change the situation any."

"You're young yet, my boy," the captain said softly. "There will come a time when dreams will be all you have left."

Collins was nervous, sitting there in the great loneliness with the captain. The turn their conversation had taken worried him, and his worry was tinged with embarrassment. It was not good to sit in on another man's innermost thoughts; that was why there were barriers between human beings. And the captain was so old, sitting there—a shell of a man with his strength eaten away by long years spent in a futile battle. If there had been but one real victory, rather than an endless slow defeat—

But there hadn't been—and yet the captain must not give up, for when he went down they all went down. "This is a real problem, sir," he said, "a problem in science. As such, it has an answer. You've told me that all of my life. If it isn't true—"

"Oh, it's true, it's true," the captain sighed, running a thin hand through his snow-white hair. "It's true as far as it goes. But it isn't just a problem in science we have to face here—it's a problem in human relationships. We have to solve *that* problem first, and even then I'm no longer sure that we're capable of solving the other. It's been so long—"

"It's impossible," Collins stated flatly, drawing the captain out. "It just couldn't have happened. What could have gone wrong? We've been over it a thousand times, all of us—studied the plans, the records, the theories. There must be an extra factor somewhere, some strange and unknowable—"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the captain violently, stung out of his apathy. "Let's have no metaphysical gibberish, my boy—not in this room."

"But how *did* it happen?"

"That's not the question," the captain snapped, his eyes flashing again. "The question is, what are we going to do about it? Here we are—accept that. Where do we go from here?"

Collins didn't answer him, for a good and simple reason. There wasn't any answer. The two men sat silently at the strange table in the semidarkness, watching the shadows on the walls and the stars beyond. A cold knot of despair gnawed at Collins' stomach. What chance did they have, really? What were the odds against them? It might be easier to give up, to let yourself drift forever down the soft corridors of thoughtlessness, to forget—

Then he looked at the captain, who watched him wordlessly. *He* had not quit—he had fought and tried and worked and

dreamed until his blood grew slow within him and *still* had not surrendered to the shadows and the darkness. He had nagged them and ridiculed them and hurt them—but he had kept them men.

Collins unfastened his belt and floated free of the chair.

"I'm going to see the other man I brought in," he said. "Maybe I can find a lead."

"Good luck, my boy," said the captain softly.

Collins pushed off against a brace and swam into the darkness. All life ended in death, that he knew. But it was how you met that death that made the difference, that marked off finally one man from another. When his turn came, as he sensed it was coming now, he wanted to go out the way a man should—and not like a mindless beast that screamed and struggled in a black vault of emptiness, unloved and alone.

The four men eyed each other over the bottle on Captain Kleberg's private table. All of them occupied chairs, but other than that their positions were remarkably dissimilar. Captain Kleberg sat in a remotely orthodox position, looking, Mark Langston thought, as though his best friend had just strolled in and punched him in the face. Stan Owens, an enigmatic smile playing around the corners of his mouth, had tilted his chair back at a precarious angle and propped his large and unlovely feet up on the table. Jim McConnell, the lanky chief engineer on the *Wilson Langford*, slouched far down with his long legs extending far underneath the table and his face just about even with the neck of the bottle. Mark Langston had turned his chair backwards and, perched on it like a saddle, puffing steadily on a thoroughly venerable pipe and occasionally bombarding all concerned with an ominous cloud of blue smoke.

"Well, gentlemen," said Mark Langston, "we seem to have walked smack into a double-dyed purple whiz."

"You've said that before," Captain Kleberg pointed out gloomily. "I want to know what we're going to *do* about it."

"And just take your time, boys," Owens said airily. "Kleberg can always find another job. He might become a tramp or something."

"They'll grind me up for glue," Captain Kleberg announced unhappily.

Jim McConnell uncoiled somewhat and cocked a finger, pistol like, at his companions. "I'd just like to point out that this

conference is getting nowhere fast," he said lazily. "Suppose we either get down to business or get out the cards and be done with it."

"Nice words, Jim," Mark Langston said. "Back them up with something."

"O.K.," agreed McConnell, hanging a cigarette at a miraculous angle out of his mouth, "here's the way I see it. First of all, we've found a derelict. It happens to be the old *Viking*, but what's the difference?"

"What's the difference?" echoed Mark Langston. *The first ship*, his mind whispered. *The first of them all*. "If you meant that, it's a singularly cold remark to make."

"Agreed," Jim McConnell nodded, smiling faintly. "If I meant it, I'm just trying to jolt you jokers down to earth, or at least to ship-level. We won't get anywhere with this ah-the-wonder-of-it-all attitude. That dead ship down there *is* the *Viking*, the first of the interstellar ships, the ship that vanished—the ship that was, in fact, an anachronism almost before it got started—but as far as we're concerned it might just as well be the *Mudball X*. With reference to this problem, it's just a ship and the sooner we start looking at it that way the sooner we'll start getting somewhere. End of speech, protected by copyright."

"Don't stop now, Jim," Captain Kleberg said. "Let's see where we get."

McConnell lit a new cigarette from the remnants of its predecessor and shifted his shoulders against the back of the chair until he was comfortable. "Here's the deal then, as I see it," he said slowly. "The *Viking* down there has been unreported for over two hundred years. As far as we can tell, there's no life on her—or at any rate none that's capable of handling her technological equipment. The *Viking* appears to be good and dead. But when she blasted off, back in the year 2100, she carried a crew of two hundred—one hundred men and one hundred women. Every schoolboy knows their story. First question: Is it possible that anyone is still alive on that ship?"

There was a long silence in Captain Kleberg's room while the four men thought of that lonely ship, alone for centuries, dead and silent and outmoded. A heroic thing, reduced to tragi-comic dimensions by the onrush of technology, and yet—

Mark Langston put his cold pipe on the table and leaned forward. "My guess is yes," he said carefully. "Yes, it's possible."

"Air?" questioned Captain Kleberg

doubtfully. "Water? Food? Gravity? The ship is dead, you know—there's no question about that part."

Langston nodded. "Yes, I've taken that into account. Look at it this way: First of all, the *Viking* was not, of course, a faster-than-light ship. The trip to Capella was expected to occupy the better part of two hundred years, with the descendants of the original crew finishing the trip. The food would be synthetic, and there would of necessity be plenty. The air supply on the *Viking* was supplied by sealed hydroponic tanks, the valves of which, unless I'm greatly mistaken, were pressure affairs that operated independently of the main power source. I think the air supply would hold out—it's at least possible. The water was carried in tanks and wouldn't be markedly affected by a power failure. Gravity? Well, there wouldn't be any, as far as I can see—"

"Man is a very adaptable animal," Stan Owens said, anticipating him. "He could survive—theoretically at any rate."

"That's it, then," McConnell said. "Until we find out differently, we'll have to assume that there is life of some sort still present in that hulk. Two hundred plus years isn't a fantastic length of time; there may very well be people on that ship. That takes care of our plan of action. It's simple. They're there, trapped. We're here, with a nice new ship. Solution: Go get them and bring them aboard."

Stan Owen's chair hit the floor with a bang.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but that's the one thing we *can't* do."

Mark Langston turned and looked at him.

Stan Owens picked up the empty bottle from the table and jabbed it in McConnell's general direction. "Think a moment, all of you," he said. "This thing isn't quite as simple as it looks and going off half-cocked isn't going to get us anything but a nice soggy fizzle."

"O.K., ape-man," McConnell sighed at the anthropologist. "I might have known that *you* would come up with something complicated. You guys wouldn't fix a bicycle without a field report and culture analysis."

Mark Langston found himself grinning broadly. It was a good feeling. Up here, with these men, things suddenly began to make sense again. It was not anything concrete, nor could he have put it into words if he had been asked. It was simply that he

was once more proud and happy to be a man. Mrs. Simmons and others of her ilk seemed to be denizens of another universe, living in another world—as, in a sense, indeed they were.

Captain Kleberg drummed his fingers on the table. "Well?"

"Look," said Stan Owens patiently. "Let's assume that everything Jim has said is true—if it isn't, if the ship is dead inside as well as out, it doesn't concern us. Let's assume that there are people, human beings, still alive on the *Viking*—people who have lived their entire lives in the darkness, who have never known gravity, who have lived in a world as different from ours as hydrogen is from uranium, who have lived in a static world of death and decay, a world slowly running down—"

A cold chill seemed to seep through the little room like an icy mist. *The children of the Viking*, Mark Langston thought with a feeling akin to awe, *the children of the Viking*—

"Let's not have any romantic hogwash, now," Stan Owens continued waving the empty bottle. "We have no way of knowing how long the *Viking* has been a dead ship, nor do we know what happened to her. But the drive was automatic, wasn't it, Jim?"

McConnell nodded. "That's right. An early atomic drive, kicking up a thrust about equal to a bit less than one-fifth light-year per year in terms of unit distance."

"It wouldn't have just failed," Mark Langston added. "It must have been tampered with."

"Well, that's all conjecture," Owens said slowly. "The important point is that at best that ship has been dead for a good hundred and fifty years, otherwise it would have been contacted by the first faster-than-light ships that tried to hunt her down. That gives us a span of four or five generations living under those upsetting and difficult conditions. Don't fool yourselves, gentlemen—man is not even a constant biologically, and when you get into psychology and culture you can expect practically anything. If there are people on that ship, I don't profess to know anything much about them—but I'll tell you for sure that they won't be like any people you ever saw before."

The other men remained silent, watching him. The great ship around them seemed somehow fragile now, and Mark Langston thought of the infinite sea in which they swam, the dark sea of space that washed



the black shores of more mysteries than man could ever know—

"O.K., there they are," Owens went on. "A hundred and fifty years is a long time—those people, if there are any, have *changed*. By this time they have either adapted themselves to their new environment or else they're long ago *kaput*. We can just forget any drivel about their forgetting where they come from, or who they are, or what they're doing there in the middle of nowhere. Some of them are bound to know—there were books on the *Viking*, certainly, and records, to say nothing of word-of-mouth communication. They'll know, no question about that. Whether they'll all believe it or not is something else again."

Jim McConnell shook his head. "O.K.," he said, "then what's the trouble all about? I still can't see—"

Stan Owens spun the bottle on the table with one hand. "We've got two possibilities," he explained. "One, they know full well what the score is. In that case, their whole lives, their very reason for being, is tied up with the *Viking*—that ship reaching Capella under her own steam and through her own efforts is the only thing that can make their living hell mean anything. Take that away from them and they are broken, dead. Take that away from them and you are murderers."

"And if they don't believe?" suggested Captain Klegberg.

"The second possibility is tougher," said Stan Owens. "If they have completely adapted to their new environment, then the shock of putting them on this ship would probably be fatal. The change would be too much; their whole culture, the very fabric of their lives, would be shattered with one blow. Ignoring that little point meant the extinction of more people than I like to think about, on Earth and elsewhere, to say nothing of butcher-wars and revolutions. We are smarter now, or at least we like to think that we are."

Mark Langston nodded at his friend. He had seen enough in his life to back up everything Owens had said, with interest. When you are dealing with human beings, you ignored the human element at your risk. "There's the question of gravity, too," he said.

"Of course," Owens agreed. "If there's been no power on the *Viking* for over a century, and thus no artificial gravity, the sudden change would wipe them out—crush

them like flies in a vice. And I dare say that Captain Kleberg wouldn't care to throw this ship into free fall from here to Capella with a load of unconditioned and generally hysterical passengers. We've got a culture too, you know."

Captain Kleberg gave his best approaching-the-guillotine smile. "Don't even think about it," he advised. "We'll all wind up in the funny room. But remember—we've got to make it fast, whatever we do. And no mistakes, of course. This may be a life or death matter for those people, and our own orbital error isn't going to be any joke, even for the computers. I'll hold this ship in position as long as necessary, but we'll have to get on with it. If there are people on that ship—"

"That's enough 'ifs' for one session, I think," smiled Mark Langston, stoking up his pipe again. "This reminds me of that old problem in which some bright boy points to a wastebasket and asks his friends if they'll bet him a million dollars that there isn't a turtle in it. Chances are that there isn't, but how do you know? You can theorize and reason all night, but there's only one way to find out for sure whether or not there is a turtle in there under the daily garbage." He paused, blowing a cloud of blue smoke across the table. "And that one way," he finished, "is to go over and look."

The small but rugged space launch, utterly dwarfed by the vast distances all around her, came down with a wrenching whine—out of hyperspace and into normal subspace where the dead *Viking* waited. The shock of the transition stunned even the trained crew, and offered convincing evidence of why the great star ship, the *Wilson Langford*, could not be so maneuvered into normal space without a minimum of five days of physical and psychological conditioning for her passengers.

Mark Langston nursed the launch toward the dark shadow of the *Viking*, which was now visible to the naked eye. It floated ahead of them, cold and alone, like a vast creature of the ocean depths that had grown old and tired and now only floated mindlessly with the currents it once had challenged. Despite the faint throbbing in his bad leg, Mark Langston felt better than he had in a long, long time. He was home, lost in the stars, and the weary years fell away from him one by one and left him young again.

The *Viking* swam nearer, dominating



space. Mark Langston guided the launch with well-remembered skill, listening to the hum of conversation behind him.

"I guess my education's been sadly neglected," a voice belonging to one of the forced-entry technicians was saying, "but I swear I don't see why the *Viking* started for Capella in the first place. Why not head for Alpha Centauri? They could have made that in twenty-plus years. Capella, unless it's all hokum put out by the Interstellar Board of Trade to justify extortion rates, is forty-two light-years from Earth."

"It's fairly simple, actually," Stan Owens

said. "They didn't head for Alpha Centauri for the same reason you don't go to a zoo when you're looking for a dream-blond in a bar—it didn't suit their purpose. You have to think back and remember what conditions were like when the *Viking* left Earth. What had they found in the solar system?"

"Same as now, more or less," the man reflected. "Except for what we've built, Mars had those lichens left from better days, Venus her dust cacti, and that's about it."

"O.K.," Owens continued. "Unless he

could reach the stars, man was alone in the universe to all practical purposes. And they were after a planet almost exactly like Earth, only older, following the logic that evolution there would have advanced the planet correspondingly and thus making it possible to harvest the fruits of many thousands—or even *millions*—of years of scientific advancement in just the space of time required to go from Earth to another Earth circling a Class G star of exactly the right specifications. They were hoping, of course, to find a faster-than-light drive to speed up the return trip for their children's children—it seemed like quite an adventure at the time, with fabulous prestige for the crew, and the possible returns to Earth made financing no problem. It just so happened that Capella was the closest star that would serve their ends, and so that was their destination. As we know, it was a wise choice—

The launch swung alongside the *Viking* and Mark Langston eased her in toward an exact velocity-match. A wise choice, he thought, looking at the black tomb before him. *A wise choice, but they couldn't have known that we'd perfect a faster-than-light drive that would render them obsolete before they ever arrived, couldn't have known what was to go wrong with their plans within fifty years there in the mute corridors of the Viking—*

"How about that?" questioned Jim McConnell thoughtfully. "If we find anyone alive in there, and manage to do anything for them, what becomes of them when they chug into Capella some twenty-thirty years from now and find out that interstellar travel is already old-hat? You talk about destroying their values, Stan, but how do you think they're going to feel when they find out that it's all been for nothing, that they might as well have stayed home?"

The launch hovered next to the black hulk of the *Viking* and Mark Langston swung her abreast of the engine room and clamped her there with gravitraction beams.

"Spacesuits," he said shortly.

"That isn't quite as tough a problem as it looks like," Stan Owens explained as he struggled into his suit. "Remember that these are not the original members of the crew—they are a wholly new group, with new values. If they manage somehow to bring the *Viking* in, that in itself will be enough. Anyhow, in a sense they are the first. We've got lots of time before the

*Viking* lands, if she does, and we can set the psychology boys to work in that interval. Don't worry—when the *Viking* approaches the Capella system she'll get a hero's—or is it heroine's—welcome that'll put all others to shame, and what's more it'll be completely genuine. There are other distinctions in life besides winning the race, you know."

"You seem to have this all figured to the last decimal point," laughed McConnell, "and we don't even know whether or not the *Viking* is empty. Nothing like looking ahead."

"The time to make your plans is before the action starts," Mark Langston said, talking now through the suit phones. "It's only in quaint types of fiction that the hero strolls thoughtlessly into a hornet's nest and then formulates stunning plans with his brilliant brain while being clubbed to death with crowbars. If he's got brains enough to think his way out of a situation, then he's got brains enough to do a little thinking before he gets up to his neck in hot water."

"You're mixing your metaphors, boy," said Jim McConnell, moving into position. "What happens to all your fine plans if I can't fix the drive on that baby?"

Mark Langston grinned. "One vote for technology," he said.

The efficient team of the launch, space-suited for protection, swung the emergency air lock and cutter into position between the launch and the dark shell of the *Viking*. McConnell's crew set the cutters with meticulous care. There was a brief whine and the lights dimmed. That was all.

"Let's go," said Mark Langston.

Cautiously, ready for anything, the men moved through the air lock one by one into the black interior of the dead *Viking*.

*Four "days" passed. A class was taught and a battle fought, and an old man spoke with his son—*

Floating through the dark tunnels, smelling the cold metal all around him, Collins thought of destiny. Destiny, so the books would have you believe, was what you made of it—fate was up to you. But it was a strange destiny, surely, that had placed him in this dark asylum, protected for the moment against the frigid death outside, even deluded into a kind of comfort, but sinking, always sinking, into a living death in the black shadows below.

Sometimes, it did seem hopeless. Without

the captain, he knew, they would be lost—the captain would lead them to safety if anyone could. He thought of the early days of the *Viking*, the early halcyon days that he had read about, when the scientists had lived in a veritable artificial paradise, with unlimited time at their disposal and the company of intelligent, congenial friends to make the long hours pass quickly. Collins wished fervently that he might have lived then, in the golden age—

Ruthlessly, he thrust the thought from his mind. What was it that the captain had said? Man could not move backwards and survive—he must go forward, not to the good old days, but to the good *new* ones.

But how much science had they managed to keep alive? *Was it enough?* Time was running out, and the problems yet to be solved were staggering. What was wrong with the engines? Even if they knew, could they fight their way through the world of the other men to the engine room? *Where was the ship?* If they could manage somehow to bring her to life again, would they have time to go anywhere—go before the synthetics were just a memory and the ship turned into a total horror of starving maniacs? And how long could even the captain bind the men to his will—men who had never known anything but darkness and free flight, men who with each passing “day” became more and more adapted to their ship asylum in the black sea of space and less and less suited for the lives of human beings? Was their fight only a hopeless race up a blind, fantastic alley?

Perhaps the younger men were right—perhaps they should simply treat the other men, with their back sliding primitive culture and superstition, as animals and try to exterminate them to make the synthetics last longer. Perhaps, from the initial revolution down to the present, it had all been their fault—perhaps they should forget about being men, forget about saving the ship, and just make the best of the life with which they were confronted.

Collins shook the thought from his mind. That way only seemed to be the easy way, he knew. That way meant death for all of them. The time would come, the time *must* come, when they would need those savage people who now crouched around their strange fires in the black world below.

Collins drifted around a corner and there was Malcolm.

Malcolm, now growing old but still with a twinkle in his eye, seemed dignified as

always in the light of his small torch. He floated rigidly in the air, his spine unbending and his clothing faultlessly neat as usual.

“I say, Collins,” he said briskly, “good to see you.”

Collins smiled. Malcolm had discovered from the records that his parents had been British, and he had therefore read all the books he could find upon an incredibly distant England and her people. He had picked up what he fancied to be British phrases, and he used them doggedly—a pathetic thing, to be sure, and a trifle comic, but Collins respected the man’s effort to build a desperate individual personality in the midst of chaos. Once he had even tried to find tea, although he hardly knew what it was.

“How’s the prisoner?” Collins asked.

“Quite well,” Malcolm replied. “He seems to be much stronger now than when you brought him in. Beastly business—what are you going to do with him?”

“Couldn’t say,” Collins shrugged. “You go and get some sleep and I’ll have a talk with our friend, O.K.?”

“Righto,” Malcolm said brightly and shoved off down the corridor.

Collins smiled again. Malcolm always made him feel better somehow. He often wondered what the man was like, deep in the innermost corners of his being—what thoughts did he have that he never shared with anyone? There weren’t many like Malcolm around any more, and when they were all gone—

Collins unlocked the corridor door and floated in to where the other man waited in the darkness.

The man watched him steadily, without fear. Collins could feel his presence in the room, vibrant, unafraid.

“You have come to kill me,” the man stated calmly.

“No,” said Collins. “I only want to talk to you—you will not be harmed.”

The man laughed in his face.

Collins ignored him and fired a torch. The flame sputtered and caught as the torch built up air pressure, pushing the shadows back and filling the room with warm orange light. Collins narrowed his eyes to slits against the glare and looked at the man. He returned the gaze frankly. He had a strong face, Collins decided. His hair was long and wild and his teeth were sharp and white. His clothing was old and wrinkled, but not unclean. There seemed to be intelligence in his eyes—or was it only the

uncertain light from the torch that made it seem so?

"Start talking," the man said shortly. "Or do you always speak without words?"

"My name is Collins," he said, forcing a smile. "I'm the one who—"

"I remember," the man said.

"Do you have a name, or must I make up one? I'm quite willing to call you Thing or Ug, but maybe you prefer your own name."

"My name is Owens."

"O.K., Owens. Now, look—I'd like to help you if I can. I know you're in a difficult position here—"

"I'll do my worrying," Owens said. "You do yours."

Collins felt himself oddly drawn toward this man before him. A savage? Perhaps. But courage was courage, and even in an enemy it commanded respect.

"You know you could be killed," he told him quietly. "I may not be able to save you for long. Our food supplies are short. I know what would happen to me if I were your captive."

"You might make a good meal at that," Owens stated.

"You," Collins informed him, "are not exactly a born diplomat. Doesn't the prospect of death mean anything to you? Your situation is not ideal, you know."

"Neither is yours," the man said surprisingly. "I have known death all my life. I know that it comes whether you are afraid of it or not, so why be afraid? Your own life will soon be over; perhaps you would do well to reserve your charity."

Collins floated toward the man through the shadows, his own eyes cold and hard. He gripped Owens' arm tightly and applied pressure until his fingers ached. Owens did not flinch and continued to meet his gaze squarely.

"What did you mean by that?" whispered Collins tensely. "What do you know about my life?"

"Your world will be dead within twenty sleep periods, and you will die with it," the man said, his voice edged with hate. "The world will be ours."

"Those are big words," Collins said, fingering his knife with his free hand. "But they are only words."

Owens smiled coldly. "You think that we are fools because we do not believe as you do," he said evenly. "You think that we are fools because we know the

stars are gods. But we know other things as well, my stupid friend."

"Such as?" suggested Collins, drawing his knife.

"You threaten me?" the savage asked, and laughed.

Collins pressed closer, his heart pulsing in his throat. *What did this man know?*

"The tanks, the air tanks," Owens hissed, his eyes wild and bright. "You think we don't know where the air comes from? We do know, and the tanks are in our part of the world—we're going to seal you off from your air, and the work has already begun."

Collins floated back, stunned. The air—Before he had a chance to recover himself, the door to the room burst open. Young Lanson hurtled through, his body quivering with excitement.

"There he is, there he is!" Lanson screamed, pointing at Owens. "Kill him!"

"Calm down," Collins snapped. "What's the matter?"

"Matter?" whispered Lanson hoarsely. "You fool, it's the captain, the captain!"

Collins just stared at him, unable to speak.

"Your father is dead," Lanson said, his voice breaking with hysteria. "He's been murdered."

Slowly, inexorably, Collins felt the fury creep through his veins. Not rage, not hot, blinding madness, but *fury*—cold, chill fury that seeped like ice through his body, into his heart, his mind—

*The captain—*

Shielded now by a wall of ice, his mind took command. He gestured toward Owens. "Bring him," he said shortly, and launched himself into the dark corridor. He left his torch with Lanson and hurtled through the darkness that was his home, his mind refusing even to think of what the captain's death meant to them now. He must think ahead, keep moving—

He swam into the control room, and there was the captain. His chest was red where they had pulled the knife out, and he was very still. His people were clustered around him in the control room and the torch cast broken shadows on the walls, but the captain could not see them. His dead eyes looked outward, out to the silver stars, and now he was alone.

"Dad," said Collins, and his voice was very small. He could not speak further. The captain had been a symbol to him all his life, a force, a principle, that held the ship together. But now, in death, he was



only an old man again, an old man with snow-white hair, and Collins was his son.

Collins felt a hand touch his. He looked up to see Helen, his wife, who knew that she could not comfort him but was brave enough to try. Collins squeezed her hand to show that he understood and then turned to his people.

"We will elect a new captain soon," he said quietly. "I will not try to assume the position unless I am asked. We have other problems before us now."

There were murmurs from the crowd, but Collins ignored them. He moved slowly over to where Owens was floating, guarded by Lanson. He looked at Owens coldly for a full minute, staring into his eyes. He waited, smiling very slightly. Then he hit him in the face.

Owens reeled back, shaking his head. Collins hit him again.

"We're going to get through to the engine room," Collins hissed, his face very close to his prisoner's. "This time we're going to get through, and you're going to take us." He hit him again and watched the blood trickle from a split lip. "Understand?"

Lanson pressed in, knife blade gleaming. "Kill him," he screamed. "Kill the—"

"Shut up." Collins looked at the man once, and that was enough. "We need our friend here. The other men are blocking off our air supply. This is our last chance. If we fail this time, we die."

The crowd shifted and moved with the shadows and tension filled the air.

"If he won't take us through—" one voice began.

"He'll take us," Collins replied.

"If we can't fix the drive after we get there—"

"We've got to try," Collins said coldly. "I tell you, those engines *couldn't* have failed! They were tampered with, shut off! If one man can turn them off, another can turn them on." He paused. "I'll kill any man who stands in my way."

"I'm on your side, old boy," Malcolm said, and didn't smile.

Collins shot him a glance and then relaxed a little. "Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to strike any heroic poses."

Malcolm shrugged. "You lead," he said. "I'll follow."

"No, that won't do," Collins pointed. "You pick a detail and stay back here—we may not come back, you know. Set the controls, and make certain that the gravity

*is adjusted to not more than one-fifth Earth-normal. Understand?"*

"Righto," said Malcolm, and moved off about his task.

"Webb, Renaldo, Echols—you older men who learned your science from the captain—are you with me?"

The men smiled their assent. One muttered something that sounded suspiciously like, "At last" and went to get his equipment. Spirit and enthusiasm, as though kindled out of the very air, needing only an initial spark, filled the chamber.

And the old captain floated alone, his dead eyes on the stars—

Collins spun Owens around and twisted the man's arm up behind his back. "O.K.," he whispered. "Let's go."

Lanson hesitated. "Now?"

"Now," said Collins flatly. "We can pick up weapons and synthetics on the way."

Quite suddenly, Owens twisted himself loose. He floated there before them, his keen eyes flashing.

"Fools!" he said clearly. "He would lead you all into death—we would be butchered before we even drew near my people's world. Do you think that my people are imbeciles, that you can simply move in and succeed where all others have failed? Your leader is a fool!"

Collins icily hit the man again in the face. Owens just laughed at him, wiping the blood away with his hand.

"You prove nothing," Owens said calmly. "You cannot answer my arguments with your fists."

Collins moved in close again and there was death in his eyes. "It's up to you to get us through," he told the man, beginning to feel the doubt slink back into the chamber and take its ugly hold on the people. "If you do not, we'll tear you apart—inch by inch."

Owens hesitated, cold sweat standing out on his forehead.

"There is a way," he said finally. "There is one way—"

Collins gripped his arm, digging his nails into the man's flesh.

"If you cannot go through," Owens pointed out, "you have to go around."

Collins felt his body go dead within him. Around? That meant—

"There's only one way," Owens said. "We'll have to go—Outside."

Stars. It was one thing to view them from the shelter of the control room but a different proposition entirely when seen

from Outside. Cold they were, and close—it seemed to Collins that he had only to reach out a space-suited hand to pluck an ice-diamond from its field of velvet black. If he should lose his footing, float off into nothingness, forever alone—

He tried not to think about it. If the dark and brooding *Viking* had seemed quiet in her strange Odyssey through the star-seas, how much more was he conscious of the silence now—not merely silence, but an absence of all sound, utter and complete. The old radios of the suits no longer functioned; the air supply was uncertain. Almost Collins fancied that his breathing was already flat and stale.

Inch by inch, foot by slow, agonizing foot, the men pulled themselves like ants along the silent side of the *Viking*. Collins could see the monstrous, incredible figure of Owens ahead of him, like a robot-suit without a human being in it. Behind him he sensed his people—Webb, Echols, Renaldo, their equipment strapped to their backs, feeling their way along the emergency guy rod even as he was doing. *Were they good enough?* The thought crept, unbidden, into his mind. *They had worked hard, they were good, but they had learned under terrible handicaps. Their tools were inadequate. Could they fix the drive? If not—*

Getting out of the *Viking* in their old spacesuits had been something of a feat in itself, although the problem was not in getting through the small air lock but in not getting *blown* through it into infinity. Getting back into the ship again through the engine room was, to say the least, going to be something else again. Owens had said that there was an operable air lock there that he had seen, one that could be opened from Outside, but—

*Was the man leading them all to their deaths? Was this all simply a last, ironic gesture of defiance?*

Collins inched his way along. He had no choice, he realized. It was act now or not at all. A chance, however desperate, was still a chance. Owens. There was something strange about that man—

Collins stared at the cold metal side of the *Viking* as he crept along it. In there, separated from him by scant feet, were the other men, the children of the revolutionaries. He was in their territory now, their part of the ship, where they gathered around their great synthetic fires and lived their proud but futile lives, sliding back, back,

back into a cold death in an empty ship—

Could they be saved, turned to use, if the ship were recovered? Collins had always said that they could, and he believed it. For all their differences, for all their strangeness, these were yet people—people who had chosen to follow a different path from his, but people none the less. A common goal, a common hope, might yet unite the two—and all hands would be needed if the *Viking* were to come through at last.

Collins smiled bitterly. What was that expression he had read in his youth? *Don't count your chickens before they're hatched*. Collins laughed, and the sound was eerily deafening in the closeness of his suit. He had never seen a chicken, and he was unworried about the hatching of an egg. He didn't have any eggs.

His stomach was a hollow knot within him and the palms of his hands, although beginning to freeze, were clammy with sweat. It seemed to him that he had been crawling for an eternity, crawling forever, crawling through the night and under the merciless stars.

*The engine room—Where was the engine room?*

They made it. Somehow, they made it. One minute he was crawling inch by inch along the endless guy rod and the next he had stopped, behind Owens. He breathed a cold breath of relief. There, bulging oddly out from the side of the dark *Viking*, was an air lock. Owens had maneuvered himself into position in front of it and was attempting to turn a valve handle. It did not move. Owens waved a gloved hand urgently.

Collins managed to get himself into position next to the other man, and together they twisted at the valve. It didn't budge. Collins felt the cold seeping into his suit and his lungs were choked and constricted. He looked at Owens. Owens looked at him, and for a moment they hung there, motionless, on the brink of eternity.

Then Collins waved to Echols, who slowly made his way over to join them. Wordlessly, Collins fumbled with the pack on Echols' back. It was slow work and his hands were very cold in their thick, insulated gloves, but he finally managed to extract a large hammer. Clumsily, he signaled to Owens and Echols to hold onto him. They braced themselves and got a firm grip on his legs.

Desperately, Collins swung the hammer at the valve. He knew that he might jam it hopelessly, but he had no time now for

niceties. The valve had to be jarred loose somehow, and that very quickly. The cold was growing worse—

Collins swung the hammer with as much force as he could muster in his awkward position and then the three men hit the valve together, pulling and tugging and clawing at it with the frenzy and the strength of men who see death staring them icily in the face.

The valve moved. With numbing fingers, they spun it until it would move no more. Then Collins and Owens grasped the handle. Together, they heaved with all their strength.

Nothing happened. The stars seemed to creep nearer—

They pulled again, despair lending strength to their numb muscles. Collins gasped, his heart pounding in his throat. Had it moved? Was it frozen? There—

With a sudden, silent explosion the air lock door puffed outward. The men held on and then moved into the small air lock one by one, almost completely filling it. Coughing for breath and numb with cold, they sealed the outer door again and went to work on the inner one. Collins tasted blood in his throat and a dead whiteness was washing over his brain.

This time, it was easier. The inner door burst open as the ship's air rushed into the air lock and then Collins led his men into the ship. Instantly, without waiting even to look around them, the men ripped off each other's helmet and gulped in great drafts of heady air. Never before in the lives of any of them had air tasted so sweet; never before had they fully realized the ecstasy of breathing.

When he had partially recovered, Collins secured a synthetic torch from Renaldo's pack and coaxed it into flame. Light leaped out, blinding his eyes, and the room jumped into sharp relief. Owens had not lied. Collins felt something that might have been tears start to his eyes as he looked around him.

They were alone in the engine room.

Collins rallied his mind, still somewhat stunned from its brush with an unfamiliar Outside, and set to work. The first requirement was safety and he floated across the chamber and checked the after door. It was closed, but unlocked. He threw the switch on it and then turned back to his companions.

The next necessity was light. Together, the men kindled torches and planted them

strategically around the room. The light was flickering and uneven, but it would have to do. Even at that, it hurt their eyes; Collins doubted that they could have stood much more.

He looked around the engine room and his doubts returned. The main plutonium pile, together with its water reactant, was, of course, invisible behind its graphalloy shielding. If the trouble proved to be not at the surface, but deep within the pile itself, Collins knew that the situation was probably hopeless. But he felt a strange exhilaration none the less. Here, at last, was a straight problem in technology—a problem too difficult for his limited means, perhaps, but still a problem he could sink his teeth into.

Collins eyed the shielding and the dials and switches with a feeling akin to awe—not superstitious awe, nor unreasoning wonder, but simply a healthy respect for a supreme accomplishment of his people. This was the power that had lifted the *Viking* long ago from the bonds of Earth, carried her beyond Pluto and into interstellar space—and this was the power that had been silent for more than a century. Had the power failed the men, or had the men failed the power? It was no mere rhetorical problem—upon its solution hinged the fate of Earth's first emissary to the stars.

The men set to work with a will. Collins, Echols, Renaldo, and Webb, the cream of the ship's scientists now that the captain was gone, went at their job with the cool precision of men who have studied and planned for many lonely years for just such an eventuality. Owens stood alone, watching, making no sound, with his face beginning to swell painfully from the blows he had received. The chamber was quiet, but filled with a tense, electric anticipation that was a tangible thing.

Invisible behind its shield, the great pile waited. Outside, hovering beyond the air lock, the stars floated in austere splendor—

The crew of four worked on, absorbed in their problem, oblivious to time. The silence was broken only by the harsh breathing and the short, staccato sentences as the men exchanged information and asked questions. They had pitifully little to go on, with their limited instruments, but they had knowledge and understanding. And they had something else—a burning, unquenchable ferocity of purpose that would not be denied. Man's problems have often

been insoluble, from those of the nameless Pleistocene hunters who challenged the mighty mammoth, to Fermi who had engineered the first self-sustaining nuclear reaction beneath the stands of faraway Chicago, to Wilson Langford who had given his life that man might reach the moon of Earth, to a host of others on the black star trails to forever—but they had always been solved.

Man was writing another chapter now—and Collins and his tiny band would not give up.

Time passed as the minutes slipped into hours and the hours crept forward into a day and on—

Finally, they had done all they could.

"It all checks, as far as I can see," said Webb, rubbing his bloodshot eyes, his great beard floating free in the air.

Renaldo nodded. "Someone threw the rods," he agreed. "That's all—there could have been no other failure, or why are the rods in place?"

Echols, thin and pale, said nothing. There was only one thing to try, his expression seemed to say. They must simply try it, and if it failed then that was that.

Collins was the first to look up. Startled, he surveyed the engine room with quick eyes. "Owens," he said quietly. "He's gone."

The others followed his gaze to the air lock door, almost without interest. They had greater problems than Owens to worry about; the man's usefulness was at an end.

"He didn't get out the door into the ship," Renaldo offered. "I would have noticed that. He's gone Outside."

"Why?" speculated Collins, and then let it drop. It could not concern them now.

"I guess we're as ready as we'll ever be," Webb said shortly, a tight little smile on his lips.

"Sequence pull," Collins said.

No man spoke what was in his heart, for there were no words. Even their thoughts were under control; they thought of the problem before them and nothing else.

One by one, the damping control rods were pulled. There were eight of them; Renaldo pulled the last.

Nothing happened. There was a deathly silence.

Collins held his breath. It might be that Malcolm, in the control room, had not followed instructions. Or they themselves had miscalculated. Or—

A tiny, feeble clicking sounded in the

room. In the silence, it was almost deafening as each fragile click was magnified in the listeners' imagination until it became a thundering roar.

"The counters," whispered Collins. "The counters—"

With a mounting intensity, the clicks increased in both numbers and strength. They beat a tattoo in the chamber, a tattoo that modulated into a smooth whir of power.

Suddenly, there was light—white, blinding light that slashed at the mind and burned into eyeballs.

Someone screamed, then choked it off.

A crushing, terrible force leaped from the floor and smashed the men down. They fell sprawling, gasping for breath, flecks of blood touching the corners of their mouths with crimson. They were pressed into the hard floor—it seemed that they must press through it entirely and out into space to perish.

A humming roar filled the engine room and the great ship, still for numberless years, vibrated with a surge of power and energy.

"Wrong," gasped Echols hoarsely, his mouth pulled out of shape by the terrible pressure. "What went wrong?"

"Nothing," coughed Collins, pulling himself along the floor like a snake. "That's it—don't you see? *Nothing*."

The four men stared at each other then, wincing from the pressure pull and the glare of the white lights. And there, prostrate, in fearful pain, they smiled.

The dead *Viking* had come back from a nameless grave; now, at last, she lived again.

Captain Kleberg, his iron-gray hair neatly combed, leaned back in his chair and with an expression almost of contentment on his face puffed on a pipe which had seen better days. Mark Langston, Jim McConnell, and Stan Owens challenged their chairs in their usual ways and perhaps drank more of Captain Kleberg's Scotch than the rule book strictly allowed.

Mark Langston's leg was throbbing unpleasantly but he ignored it. The murmur of the vibrations, the distant hum of buzzers, the clicking of instruments, the far-off song of the jets—all these were once more blended together into music he had known. What he had done, and what he had seen, on the dark *Viking* had washed his bitterness away as though it had never existed. He could look his fellow man in the eye again, with pride. That was one of

those things you never discussed with anyone, that stayed bottled up within you always—but that was also one of the things that counted in the long run.

"They never would have had a prayer alone," Stan Owens said, "Not a prayer."

"Hardly," agreed McConnell. "It was almost more than we could manage, even with the power unit from the launch, to clear that drive and rig the rods so they could handle them. They wouldn't have had as good a chance as a man trying to build a spaceship with a screwdriver."

"From one point of view they were ridiculously overconfident in even trying to get that ship going again," Owens said thoughtfully, sipping his drink. "That was one reason the captain had to go—he knew too much to try. As long as he lived, the situation was static; if he had remained in command we couldn't have done a thing."

The captain, Mark Langston chewed on the stem of his pipe but didn't light it. He could see the captain now, alone in that great control room, his old eyes alert as he listened to them explaining to him why he had to relinquish his command for the good of his ship. He could hear Owens' quiet voice showing him how his men put their trust in him as a symbol, and waited for him to save them—waited too long. He could hear the captain's slow, careful questions. And he could see—the knife, the sudden knife, the knife they had not been able to stop. The captain, sizing up the situation, had taken his own life to give his people the best possible chance. No man had ever given more—

McConnell hung a cigarette at an impossible angle out of his mouth. "You feeling any better?" he asked Owens. "You took quite a beating in there."

Stan Owens fingered his battered face ruefully. "I didn't see any other way to handle it," he said. "Next time I'll just walk through a meat grinder."

Stan Owens, Mark Langston looked at his friend. *It had all been his plan, his responsibility—and he, more than any other man, had brought life again to the lost Viking. The old captain, his son Collins, Webb, Renaldo, Echols, the strange and wonderful Englishman Malcolm—these would one day be household names, known to every schoolboy from the saga of the first of the interstellar ships. But who would ever hear the name of Stan Owens, save perhaps as a dimly-remembered legend, a ghost-name? Would historians of the*

*future ever figure out what really had happened on that dark ship—and would they correctly identify Owens as the "savage" who had led Collins to the engine room? Would they puzzle unduly over the extra air lock that had not been present when the ship left Earth? Would they ever understand that a witch had been made with Collins' original prisoner, with Owens taking over his story of a vanishing air supply to goad the desperate Collins into action?*

*It had been a masterly plan, considering the time handicaps under which it was devised and executed. The prisoner they had removed from under old Malcolm's eyes had been closeted and given a strong psychological conditioning—he himself had helped in that—so that he would exert a favorable influence among his people when the ship came to life again.*

*It would take the Viking thirty years or more to finish her incredible voyage to Capella—but she would get there and find a subtly directed welcome that would surpass her wildest dreams. Civilization would thrill to her story, and Collins and Webb and Renaldo and Echols would be immortalized in story, picture, and legend.*

*And Stan Owens? Jim McConnell? Captain Kleberg? Members of the complement of the Wilson Langford, inexcusably late on a standard run from Earth. Except in a few forever-secret records, they would be unknown.*

*And it did not matter—that was the best part of it.*

Mark Langston came back to the present with a start. He glanced at his watch. Almost time to go back on duty again—

"I want you to know," Jim McConnell was saying, "that I now qualify as an expert on primitive plutonium drives. Me and the boys, we can go roost in a museum in our old age."

"My only regret," said Stan Owens, "is that I have not one report I can give for my profession. Those two halves of the Viking, the one oriented around the captain as a symbol of security, the other slipping back into a never-never culture that would delight the boys at the Academy, form just about the most magnificent examples of belief systems under stress that have ever gone unrecorded in the annals of—"

"O.K., O.K.," interrupted Captain Kleberg. "We surrender."

[Continued on page 64]



# WHAT HAVE I DONE?

By MARK CLIFTON

IT had to be I. It would be stupid to say that the burden should have fallen to a great statesman, a world leader, a renowned scientist. With all modesty, I think I am one of the few who could have caught the problem early enough to avert disaster. I have a peculiar skill. The whole thing hinged on that. I have learned to know human beings.

The first time I saw the fellow, I was at the drugstore counter buying cigarettes. He was standing at the magazine rack. One might have thought from the expression on his face that he had never seen magazines before. Still, quite a number of people get that rapt and vacant look when they can't make up their minds to a choice.

The thing which bothered me in that casual glance was that I couldn't recognize him.

There are others who can match my record in taking case histories. I happened to be the one who came in contact with this fellow. For thirty years I have been listening to, talking with, counseling people—over two hundred thousand of them. They have not been routine interviews. I have brought intelligence, sensitivity and concern to each of them.

Mine has been a driving, burning desire to know people. Not from the western scientific point of view of devising tools and rules to measure animated robots and ignoring the man beneath. Nor from the eastern metaphysical approach to painting a picture of the soul by blowing one's breath upon a fog to be blurred and dispersed by the next breath.

Mine was the aim to know the man by making use of both. And there was some success.

A competent geographer can look at a crude sketch of a map and instantly orient himself to it anywhere in the world—the bend of a river, the angle of a lake, the twist of a mountain range. And he can mystify by telling in finest detail what is to be found there.

After about fifty thousand studies where I could predict and then observe and check, with me it became the lift of a brow, the curve of a mouth, the gesture of a hand, the slope of a shoulder. One of the universities became interested, and over a long controlled period they rated me ninety-two

per cent accurate. That was fifteen years ago. I may have improved some since.

Yet standing there at the cigarette counter and glancing at the young fellow at the magazine rack, I could read nothing. Nothing at all.

If this had been an ordinary face, I would have catalogued it and forgotten it automatically. I see them by the thousands. But this face would not be catalogued nor forgotten, because there was nothing in it.

I started to write that it wasn't even a face, but of course it was. Every human being has a face—of one sort or another.

In build he was short, muscular, rather well proportioned. The hair was crew cut and blond, the eyes were blue, the skin fair. All nice and standard Teutonic—only it wasn't.

I finished paying for my cigarettes and gave him one more glance, hoping to surprise an expression which had some meaning. There was none. I left him standing there and walked out on the street and around the corner. The street, the store fronts, the traffic cop on the corner, the warm sunshine were all so familiar I didn't see them. I climbed the stairs to my office in the building over the drug store. My employment agency waiting room was empty. I don't cater to much of a crowd because it cuts down my opportunity to talk with people and further my study.

Margie, my receptionist, was busy making out some kind of a report and merely nodded as I passed her desk to my own office. She is a good conscientious girl who can't understand why I spend so much time working with bums and drunks and other psychos who obviously won't bring fees into the sometimes too small bank account.

I sat down at my desk and said aloud to myself, "The guy is a fake! As obvious as a high school boy's drafting of a dollar bill."

I heard myself say that and wondered if I was going nuts, myself. What did I mean by fake? I shrugged. So I happened to see a bird I couldn't read, that was all.

Then it struck me. But that would be unique. I hadn't had that experience for twenty years. Imagine the delight, after all these years, of exploring an unreadable!

I rushed out of my office and back down the stairs to the street. Hallahan, the traffic

cop, saw me running up the street and looked at me curiously. I signalled to him with a wave of a hand that everything was all right. He lifted his cap and scratched his head. He shook his head slowly and settled his cap back down. He blew a whistle at a woman driver and went back to directing traffic.

I ran into the drugstore. Of course the guy wasn't there. I looked all around, hoping he was hiding behind the pots and pans counter, or something. No guy.

I walked quickly back out on the street and down to the next corner. I looked up and down the side streets. No guy.

I dragged my feet reluctantly back toward the office. I called up the face again to study it. It did no good. The first mental glimpse of it told me there was nothing to find. Logic told me there was nothing to find. If there had been, I wouldn't be in such a stew. The face was empty—completely void of human feelings or character.

No, those weren't the right words. Completely void of human—being!

I walked on past the drugstore again and looked in curiously, hoping I would see him. Hallahan was facing my direction again, and he grinned crookedly at me. I expect around the neighborhood I am known as a character. I ask the queerest questions of people, from a layman's point of view. Still, applicants sometimes tell me that when they asked a cop where was an employment agent they could trust they were sent to me.

I climbed the stairs again, and walked into my waiting room. Margie looked at me curiously, but she only said, "There's an applicant. I had him wait in your office." She looked like she wanted to say more, and then shrugged. Or maybe she shivered. I knew there was something wrong with the bird, or she would have kept him in the waiting room.

I opened the door to my office, and experienced an overwhelming sense of relief, fulfillment. It was he. Still, it was logical that he should be there. I run an employment agency. People come to me to get help finding work. If others, why not he?

My skill includes the control of my outward reactions. That fellow could have no idea of the delight I felt at the opportunity to get a full history. If I had found him on the street, the best I might have done was a stock question about what time is it, or have you got a match, or where is the city

hall. Here I could question him to my heart's content.

I took his history without comment, and stuck to routine questions. It was all exactly right.

He was ex-G.I., just completed college, major in astronomy, no experience, no skills, no faintest idea of what he wanted to do, nothing to offer an employer—all perfectly normal for a young grad.

No feeling or expression either. Not so normal. Usually they're petulantly resentful that business doesn't swoon at the chance of hiring them. I resigned myself to the old one-two of attempting to steer him toward something practical.

"Astronomy?" I asked. "That means you're heavy in math. Frequently we can place a strong math skill in statistical work." I was hopeful I could get a spark of something.

It turned out he wasn't very good at math. "I haven't yet reconciled my math to—" he stopped. For the first time he showed a reaction—hesitancy. Prior to that he had been a statue from Greece—the rounded expressionless eyes, the too perfect features undisturbed by thought.

He caught his remark and finished, "I'm just not very good at math, that's all."

I sighed to myself. I'm used to that, too. They give degrees nowadays to get rid of the guys, I suppose. Sometimes I'll go for days without uncovering any usable knowledge. So in a way, that was normal.

The only abnormal part of it was he seemed to think it didn't sound right. Usually the lads don't even realize they should know something. He seemed to think he pulled a boner by admitting that a man can take a degree in astronomy without learning math. Well I wouldn't be surprised to see them take their degree without learning math. Well, I wouldn't be surprised to see them take their degree without knowing how many planets there are.

He began to fidget a bit. That was strange, also, I thought I knew every possible combination of muscular contractions and expansions. This fidget had all the reality of a puppet activated by an amateur. And the eyes—still completely blank.

I led him up one mental street and down the next. And of all the false-fronted stores and cardboard houses and paper lawns, I never saw the like. I get something of that once in a while from a fellow who has spent a long term in prison and comes in with a manufactured past—but never anything as phony as this one was.

Interesting aspect to it. Most guys, when they realize you've spotted them for a phony, get out as soon as they can. He didn't. It was almost as though he were—well testing; to see if his answers would stand up.

I tried talking astronomy, of which I thought I knew a little. I found I didn't know anything, or he didn't. This bird's astronomy and mine had no point of reconciliation.

And then he had a slip of the tongue—yes he did. He was talking, and said, "The ten planets—"

He caught himself, "Oh that's right. There's only nine."

Could be ignorance, but I didn't think so. Could be he knew of the existence of a planet we hadn't yet discovered.

I smiled. I opened a desk drawer and pulled out a couple science-fiction magazines. "Ever read any of these?" I asked.

"I looked through several of them at the newsstand a while ago," he answered.

"They've enlarged my vision," I said. "Even to the point where I could believe that some other star system might hold intelligence." I lit a cigarette and waited. If I was wrong, he would merely think I was talking at random.

His blank eyes changed. They were no longer Greek statue eyes. They were no longer blue. They were black deep bottomless black, as deep and cold as space itself.

"Where did I fail in my test?" he asked. His lips formed a smile which was not a smile—a carefully painted-on-canvas sort of smile.

Well, I'd had my answer. I'd explored something unique, all right. Sitting there before me, I had no way of determining whether he was benign or evil. No way of knowing his motive. No way of judging—anything. When it takes a lifetime of learning how to judge even our own kind, what standards have we for judging an entity from another star system?

At that moment I would like to have been one of those space-opera heroes who, in similar circumstances, laugh casually and say, "What ho! So you're from Arcturus. Well, well. It's a small universe after all, isn't it?" And then with linked arms they head for the nearest bar, bosom pals.

I had the almost hysterical thought, but carefully suppressed, that I didn't know if this fellow would like beer or not. I will not go through the intermuscular and visceral reactions I experienced. I kept my seat and maintained a polite expression.

Even with humans, I know when to walk carefully.

"I couldn't feel anything about you," I answered his question. "I couldn't feel anything but blankness."

He looked blank. His eyes were nice blue marble again. I liked them better that way.

There should be a million questions to be asked, but I must have been bothered by the feeling that I held a loaded bomb in my hands. And not knowing what might set it off, or how, or when, I could think of only the most trivial.

"How long have you been on Earth?" I asked. Sort of a when did you get back in town, Joe, kind of triviality.

"For several of your weeks," he was answering. "But this is my first time out among humans."

"Where have you been in the meantime?" I asked.

"Training." His answers were getting short and his muscles began to fidget again.

"And where do you train?" I kept boring in.

As an answer he stood up and held out his hand, all quite correctly. "I must go now," he said. "Naturally you can cancel my application for employment. Obviously we have more to learn."

I raised an eyebrow. "And I'm supposed to just pass over the whole thing? A thing like this?"

He smiled again. The contrived smile which was a symbol to indicate courtesy. "I believe your custom on this planet is to turn your problems over to your police. You might try that." I could not tell whether it was irony or logic.

At that moment I could think of nothing else to say. He walked out of my door while I stood beside my desk and watched him go.

Well, what was I supposed to do? Follow him?

I followed him.

Now I'm no private eye, but I've read my share of mystery stories. I knew enough to keep out of sight. I followed him about a dozen blocks into a quiet residential section of small homes. I was standing behind a palm tree, lighting a cigarette, when he went up the walk of one of these small houses. I saw him twiddle with the door, open it, and walk in. The door closed.

I hung around a while and then went up to the door. I punched the doorbell. A motherly gray-haired woman came to the

door, drying her hands on her apron. As she opened the door she said, "I'm not buying anything today."

Just the same, her eyes looked curious as to what I might have.

I grinned my best grin for elderly ladies. "I'm not selling anything, either," I answered. I handed her my agency card. She looked at it curiously and then looked a question at me.

"I'd like to see Joseph Hoffman," I said politely.

She looked puzzled. "I'm afraid you've got the wrong address, sir," she answered.

I got prepared to stick my foot in the door, but it wasn't necessary. "He was in my office just a few minutes ago," I said. "He gave that name and this address. A job came in right after he left the office, and since I was going to be in this neighborhood anyway, I thought I'd drop by and tell him in person. It's sort of rush," I finished. It had happened many times before, but this time it sounded lame.

"Nobody lives here but me and my husband," she insisted. "He's retired."

I didn't care if he hung by his toes from trees. I wanted a young fellow.

"But I saw the young fellow come in here," I argued. "I was just coming around the corner, trying to catch him. I saw him."

She looked at me suspiciously. "I don't know what your racket is," she said through thin lips, "but I'm not buying anything. I'm not signing anything. I don't even want to talk to you." She was stubborn about it.

I apologized and mumbled something about maybe making a mistake.

"I should say you have," she rapped out tartly and shut the door in righteous indignation. Sincere, too. I could tell.

An employment agent who gets the reputation of being a right guy makes all kinds of friends. That poor old lady must have thought a plague of locusts had swept in on her for the next few days.

First the telephone repair man had to investigate an alleged complaint. Then a gas service man had to check the plumbing. An electrician complained there was a power short in the block and he had to trace their house wiring. We kept our fingers crossed hoping the old geezer had never been a construction man. There was a mistake in the last census, and a guy asked her a million questions.

That house was gone over rafter by rafter and sill by sill, attic and basement.

It was precisely as she said. She and her husband lived there; nobody else.

In frustration, I waited three months. I wore out the sidewalks haunting the neighborhood. Nothing.

Then one day my office door opened and Margie ushered a young man in. Behind his back she was radiating heart throbs and fluttering her eyes.

He was the traditionally tall, dark and handsome young fellow, with a ready grin and sparkling dark eyes. His personality hit me like a sledge hammer. A guy like that never needs to go to an employment agency. Any employer will hire him at the drop of a hat, and wonder later why he did it.

His name was Einar Johnson. Extraction, Norwegian. The dark Norse strain, I judged. I took a chance on him thinking he had walked into a booby hatch.

"The last time I talked with you," I said, "your name was Joseph Hoffman. You were Teutonic then. Not Norse."

The sparkle went out of his eyes. His face showed exasperation and there was plenty of it. It looked real, too, not painted on.

"All right. Where did I flunk this time?" he asked impatiently.

"It would take me too long to tell you," I answered. "Suppose you start talking." Strangely, I was at ease. I knew that underneath he was the same incomprehensible entity, but his surface was so good that I was lulled.

He looked at me levelly for a long moment. Then he said, "I didn't think there was a chance in a million of being recognized. I'll admit that other character we created was crude. We've learned considerable since then, and we've concentrated everything on this personality I'm wearing."

He paused and flashed his teeth at me. I felt like hiring him, myself. "I've been all over Southern California in this one," he said. "I've had a short job as a salesman. I've been to dances and parties. I've got drunk and sober again. Nobody, I say nobody, has shown even the slightest suspicion."

"Not very observing, were they?" I taunted.

"But you are," he answered. "That's why I came back here for the final test. I'd like to know where I failed." He was firm.

"We get quite a few phonies," I answered. "The guy drawing unemployment and stalling until it is run out. The geezik whose

wife drives him out and threatens to quit her job if he doesn't go to work. The plainclothes detail smelling around to see if maybe we aren't a cover for a bookie joint or something. Dozens of phonies."

He looked curious. I said in disgust. "We know in the first two minutes they're phony. You were phony also, but not of any class I've seen before. And," I finished dryly, "I've been waiting for you."

"Why was I phony?" he persisted.

"Too much personality force," I answered. "Human beings just don't have that much force. I felt like I'd been knocked flat on my . . . well . . . back."

He sighed. "I've been afraid you would recognize me one way or another. I communicated with home. I was advised that if you spotted me, I was to instruct you to assist us."

I lifted a brow. I wasn't sure just how much authority they had to instruct me to do anything.

"I was to instruct you to take over the supervision of our final training, so that no one could ever spot us. If we are going to carry out our original plan that is necessary. If not, then we will have to use the alternate." He was almost didactic in his manner, but his charm of personality still radiated like an infra red lamp.

"You're going to have to tell me a great deal more than that," I said.

He glanced at my closed door.

"We won't be interrupted," I said. "A personal history is private."

"I come from one of the planets of Arcturus," he said.

I must have allowed a smile of amusement to show on my face, for he asked, "You find that amusing?"

"No," I answered soberly, and my pulses leaped because the question confirmed my conclusion that he could not read my thoughts. Apparently we were as alien to him as he to us. "I was amused," I explained, because the first time I saw you I said to myself that as far as recognizing you, you might have come from Arcturus. Now it turns out that accidentally I was correct, I'm better than I thought."

He gave a fleeting polite smile in acknowledgment. "My home planet," he went on, "is similar to yours. Except that we have grown overpopulated."

I felt a twinge of fear.

"We have made a study of this planet and have decided to colonize it." It was a flat statement, without any doubt behind it.

I flashed him a look of incredulity. "And you expect me to help you with that?"

He gave me a worldly wise look—almost an ancient look. "Why not?" he asked.

"There is the matter of loyalty to my own kind, for one thing," I said. "Not too many generations away and we'll be overpopulated also. There would hardly be room for both your people and ours on Earth."

"Oh that's all right," he answered easily. "There'll be plenty of room for us for quite some time. We multiply slowly."

"We don't," I said shortly. I felt this conversation should be taking place between him and some great statesman—not me.

"You don't seem to understand he said patiently. "Your race won't be here. We have found no reason why your race should be preserved. You will die away as we absorb."

"Now just a moment," I interrupted. "I don't want our race to die off." The way he looked at me I felt like a spoiled brat who didn't want to go beddie time.

"Why not?" he asked.

I was stumped. That's a good question when it is put logically. Just try to think of a logical reason why the human race should survive. I gave him at least something.

"Mankind," I said, "has had a hard struggle. We've paid a tremendous price in pain and death for our growth. Not to have a future to look forward to would be like paying for something and never getting the use of it."

It was the best I could think of, honest. To base argument on humanity and right and justice and mercy would leave me wide open. Because it is obvious that man doesn't practice any of these. There is no assurance he ever will.

But he was ready for me, even with that one. "But if we are never suspected, and if we absorb and replace gradually, who is to know there is no future for humans?"

And as abruptly as the last time, he stood up suddenly. "Of course," he said coldly, "we could use our alternative plan: Destroy the human race without further negotiation. It is not our way to cause needless pain to any life form. But we can."

"If you do not assist us, then it is obvious that we will eventually be discovered. You are aware of the difficulty of even blending from one country on Earth to another. How much more difficult it is where there is no point of contact at all. And if we are dis-



covered, destruction would be the only step left."

He smiled and all the force of his charm hit me again. "I know you will want to think it over for a time. I'll return."

He walked to the door, then smiled back at me. "And don't bother to trouble that poor little woman in that house again. Her doorway is only one of many entrances we have opened. She doesn't see us at all, and merely wonders why her latch doesn't work sometimes. And we can open another, anywhere, anytime. Like this—"

He was gone.

I walked over and opened the door. Margie was all prettied up and looking expectant and radiant. When she didn't see him come out she got up and peeked into my office. "But where did he go?" she asked with wide eyes.

"Get hold of yourself, girl," I answered. "You're so dazed you didn't even see him walk right by you."

"There's something fishy going on here," she said.

Well, I had a problem. A first rate, genuine, dyed in the wool dilemma.

What was I to do? I could have gone to the local authorities and got locked up for being a psycho. I could have gone to the college professors and got locked up for being a psycho. I could have gone to maybe the FBI and got locked up for being a psycho. That line of thinking began to get monotonous.

I did the one thing which I thought might bring help. I wrote up the happenings and sent it to my favorite science-fiction magazine. I asked for help and sage counsel from the one place I felt awareness and comprehension might be reached.

The manuscript bounced back so fast it might have had rubber bands attached to it, stretched from California to New York. I looked the little rejection slip all over, front and back, and I did not find upon it those sage words of counsel I needed. There wasn't even a printed invitation to try again some time.

And for the first time in my life I knew what it was to be alone—genuinely and irrevocably alone.

Still, I could not blame the editor. I could see him cast the manuscript from him in disgust, saying, "Bah! So another evil race comes to conquer Earth. If I gave the fans one more of those, I'd be run out of my office." And like the deacon who saw the

naughty words written on the fence, saying, "And misspelled, too."

The fable of the boy who cried "Wolf! Wolf!" once too often came home to me now. I was alone with my problem. The dilemma was my own. On one hand was immediate extermination. I did not doubt it. A race which can open doors from one star system to another, without even visible means of mechanism, would also know how to—disinfect.

On the other hand was extinction, gradual, but equally certain, and none the less effective in that it would not be perceived. If I refused to assist, then acting as one lone judge of all the race, I condemned it. If I did assist, I would be arch traitor, with an equal final result.

For days I sweltered in my miasma of indecision. Like many a man before me, uncertain of what to do, I temporized. I decided to play for time. To play the role of traitor in the hopes I might learn a way of defeating them.

Once I had made up my mind, my thoughts raced wildly through the possibilities. If I were to be their instructor on how to walk unsuspected among men, then I would have them wholly in my grasp. If I could build traits into them, common ordinary traits which they could see in men all about them, yet which would make men turn and destroy them, then I would have my solution.

And I knew human beings. Perhaps it was right, after all, that it became my problem. Mine alone.

I shuddered now to think what might have happened had this being fallen into less skilled hands and told his story. Perhaps by now there would be no man left upon Earth.

Yes, the old and worn-out plot of the one little unknown guy who saved Earth from outer evil might yet run its course in reality.

I was ready for the Arcturan when he returned. And he did return.

Einar Johnson and I walked out of my office after I had sent a tearful Margie on a long vacation with fancy pay. Einar had plenty of money, and was liberal with it. When a fellow can open some sort of fourth-dimensional door into a bank vault and help himself, money is no problem.

I had visions of the poor bank clerks trying to explain things to the examiners, but that wasn't my worry right now.

We walked out of the office and I snapped

the lock shut behind me. Always conscious of the cares of people looking for work, I hung a sign on the door saying I was ill and didn't know when I would be back.

We walked down the stairs and into the parking lot. We got into my car, my own car, please note, and I found myself sitting in a sheltered patio in Beverly Hills. Just like that. No awful wrenching and turning my insides out. No worrisome nausea and emptiness of space. Nothing to dramatize it at all. Car—patio, like that.

I would like to be able to describe the Arcturans as having long snaky appendages and evil slobbering maws, and stuff like that. But I can't describe the Arcturans, because I didn't see any.

I saw a gathering of people, roughly about thirty of them, wandering around the patio, swimming in the pool, going in and out of the side doors of the house. It was a perfect spot. No one bothers the big Beverly Hills home without invitation.

The natives wouldn't be caught dead looking toward a star's house. The tourists see the winding drive, the trees and grass, and perhaps a glimpse of a gabled roof. If they can get any thrill out of that then bless their little spending money hearts, they're welcome to it.

Yet if it should become known that a crowd of strange acting people are wandering around in the grounds, no one would think a thing about it. They don't come any more zany than the Hollywood crowd.

Only these were. These people could have made a fortune as life-size puppets. I could see now why it was judged that the lifeless Teutonic I had first interviewed was thought adequate to mingle with human beings. By comparison with these, he was a snappy song and dance man.

But that is all I saw. Vacant bodies wandering around, going through human motions, without human emotions. The job looked bigger than I had thought. And yet, if this was their idea of how to win friends and influence people, I might be successful after all.

There are dozens of questions the curious might want answered—such as how did they get hold of the house and how did they get their human bodies and where did they learn to speak English, and stuff. I wasn't too curious. I had important things to think about. I supposed they were able to do it, because here it was.

I'll cut the following weeks short. I cannot conceive of what life and civilization

on their planet might be like. Yardsticks of scientific psychology are used to measure a man, and yet they give no indication at all of the inner spirit of him, likewise, the descriptive measurements of their civilization are empty and meaningless. Knowing about a man, and knowing a man are two entirely different things.

For example, all those thalamic urges and urgencies which we call emotion were completely unknown to them, except as they saw them in antics on TV. The ideals of man were also unknown—truth, honor, justice, perfection—all unknown. They had not even a division of sexes, and the emotion we call love was beyond their understanding. The TV stories they saw must have been like watching a parade of ants.

What purpose can be gained by describing such a civilization to man? Man cannot conceive accomplishment without first having the dream. Yet it was obvious that they accomplished, for they were here.

When I finally realized there was no point of contact between man and these, I knew relief and joy once more. My job was easy. I knew how to destroy them. And I suspected they could not avoid my trap.

They could not avoid my trap because they had human bodies. Perhaps they conceived them out of thin air, but the veins bled, the flesh felt pain and heat and pressure, the glands secreted.

Ah yes, the glands secreted. They would learn what emotion could be. And I was a master at wielding emotion. The dream of man has been to strive toward the great and immortal ideals. His literature is filled with admonishments to that end. In comparison with the volume of work which tells us what we should be, there is very little which reveals us as we are.

As part of my training course, I chose the world's great literature, and painting, and sculpture, and music—those mediums which best portray man lifting to the stars. I gave them first of all, the dream.

And with the dream, and with the pressure of the glands as kicker, they began to know emotion. I had respect for the superb acting of Einar when I realized that he, also, had still known no emotion.

They moved from the puppet to the newborn babe—a newborn babe in training, with an adult body, and its matured glandular equation.

I saw emotions, all right. Emotions without restraint, emotions unfettered by taboos,

emotions uncontrolled by ideals. Sometimes I became frightened and all my skill in manipulating emotions was needed. At other times they became perhaps a little too Hollywood even for Hollywood, I trained them into more ideal patterns.

I will say this for the Arcturans. They learned—fast. The crowd of puppets to the newborn babes, to the boisterous boys and girls, to the moody and unpredictable youths, to the matured and balanced men and women. I watched the metamorphosis take place over the period of weeks.

I did more.

All that human beings had ever hoped to be, the brilliant, the idealistic, the great in heart, I made of these. My little 145 I.Q. became a moron's level. The dreams of the greatness of man which I had known became the vaguest wisps of fog before the reality which these achieved.

My plan was working.

Full formed, they were almost like gods. And training these things into them, I trained their own traits out. One point I found we had in common. They were activated by logic, logic carried to heights of which I had never dreamed. Yet my poor and halting logic found point of contact.

They realized at last that if they let their own life force and motivation remain active they would carry the aura of strangeness to defeat their purpose. I worried, when they accepted this. I felt perhaps they were laying a trap for me, as I did for them. Then I realized that I had not taught them deceit.

And it was logical, to them, that they follow my training completely. Reversing the position, placing myself upon their planet, trying to become like them, I must of necessity follow my instructor without question. What else could they do?

At first they saw no strangeness that I should assist them to destroy my race. In their logic the Arcturan was most fit to survive, therefore he should survive. The human was less fit, therefore he should perish.

I taught them the emotion of compassion. And when they began to mature their human thought and emotion, and their intellect was blended and shaded by such emotion, at last they understood my dilemma.

There was irony in that. From my own kind I could expect no understanding. From the invaders I received sympathy and compassion. They understand at last my

traitorous action to buy a few more years for Man.

Yet their Arcturan logic prevailed. They wept with me, but there could be no change of plan. The plan was fixed, they were merely instruments by which it was to be carried out.

Yet, through their compassion, I did get the plan modified.

This was the conversation which revealed that modification. Einar Johnson, who as the most fully developed had been my constant companion, said to me one day, "To all intents and purposes we have become human beings." He looked at me and smiled with fondness, "You have said it is so, and it must be so. For we begin to realize what a great and glorious thing a human is."

The light of nobility shone from him like an aura as he told me this, "Without human bodies, and without the emotion-intelligence equation which you call soul, our home planet cannot begin to grasp the growth we have achieved. We know now that we will never return to our own form, for by doing that we would lose what we have gained.

"Our people are logical, and they must of necessity accept our recommendation, as long as it does not abandon the plan entirely. We have reported what we have learned, and it is conceived that both our races can inhabit the Universe side by side.

"There will be no more migration from our planet to yours. We will remain, and we will multiply, and we will live in honor, such as you have taught us, among you. In time perhaps we may achieve the greatness which all humans now have.

"And we will assist the human kind to find their destiny among the stars as we have done."

I bowed my head and wept. For I knew that I had won.

Four months had gone. I returned to my own neighborhood. On the corner Hallahan left the traffic to shift for itself while he came over to me with the question, "Where have you been?"

"I've been sick," I said.

"You look it" he said frankly. "Take care of yourself, man. Hey—Lookit that fool messing up traffic." He was gone, blowing his whistle in a temper.

I climbed the stairs. They still needed repainting as much as ever. From time to time I had been able to mail money to Margie, and she had kept the rent and

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telephone paid. The sign was still on my door. My key opened the lock.

The waiting room had that musty, they've-gone-away look about it. The janitor had kept the windows tightly closed and there was no freshness in the air. I half hoped to see Margie sitting at her desk, but I knew there was no purpose to it. When a girl is being paid for her time and has nothing to do, the beach is a nice place to spend it.

There was dust on my chair, and I sank down into it without bothering about the seat of my pants. I buried my head in my arms and I looked into the human soul.

Now the whole thing hinged on that skill. I know human beings. I know them as well as anyone in the world, and far better than most.

I looked into the past and I saw a review of the great and fine and noble and divine torn and burned and crucified by man.

Yet my only hope of saving my race

was to build these qualities, the fine, the noble, the splendid, into these thirty beings. To create the illusion that all men were likewise great. No less power could have gained the boon of equality for man with them.

I look into the future. I see them, one by one, destroyed. I gave them no defense. They are totally unprepared to meet man as he genuinely is—and they are incapable of understanding.

For these things which man purports to admire the most—the noble, the brilliant, the splendid—these are the very things he cannot tolerate when he finds them.

Defenseless, because they cannot comprehend, these thirty will go down beneath the ravening fury of rending and destroying man always displays whenever he meets his ideal face to face.

I bury my head in my hands.

What have I done?

## STARDUST

(Continued from page 55)

Mark Langston dismounted from his chair. "Time for me to be thrown to the wolves," he announced sadly.

McConnell laughed, waving one of his eternal cigarettes in the air. "A reward for a hero," he said cheerfully. "For unprecedented valor, we award to you Mrs. Simmons."

"Thank you," said Mark Langston. "I am overwhelmed."

"Good enough for you, boy," Stan Owens said with a smile. "I'll always believe it was you who fixed that jam on the air lock—you were trying to turn me into an ice cube, and you deserve a fate worse than death."

"Coming right up," Mark Langston assured him. "Dear Mrs. Simmons, the scourge of the spaceways, and that devil's brood of hers, are hot on the trail now that they've found out how late we're running. Poor Raleigh has been fighting her for hours."

"Time to rush in another cavalry troop," Captain Kleberg ordered gravely. "Carry on, Langston—chin up."

Kleberg, Owens, and McConnell applauded wildly as Mark Langston left the room to return to his post. He grinned and limped down the corridor to the lift. One

thing was sure—if he was still alive when she came in, he was going to be there to watch the *Viking* land. With that to look forward to, he could stand a lot.

Whistling a thoroughly bawdy and completely off-key tune, Mark Langston marched in to face Mrs. Simmons and extricate young Raleigh from his peril.

*Four weeks passed. A ship lived again, and a son spoke to his father—*

Collins stood alone in the midst of the noise and activity of the control-room. The white lights beat down on him and even behind his standard dark glasses his eyes hurt. To every man, woman, and child on the ship, he was the captain now—with one exception. To Collins himself, there would always be only one captain.

He walked carefully over to the viewport, forcing his untrained muscles to carry him through the light gravity. It would be years, he knew, before they could stand one-half normal gravity—but they would make it.

Collins stood alone, looking out at the stars his father had loved. Very softly then, so that only he could hear, he whispered a promise:

"We're coming."